

Because I'm not me without you by millelav

Series: Because I'm not me without you [1]

Category: 文豪ストレイドッグス | Bungou Stray Dogs

Genre: Alternate Universe - Childhood Friends, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Alternate Universe - No Powers, Attempt at Humor, Caring Dazai Osamu (Bungou Stray Dogs), Caring Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai Osamu Needs Therapy (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai Osamu Needs a Hug (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai Osamu Tries His Best (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai Osamu is Bad at Feelings (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai Osamu is a Mess (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai Osamu-centric (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai is trying so hard, Dazai-Typical Suicide Mentions (Bungou Stray Dogs), Depression, Domestic Fluff, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Fluff, Fluff and Angst, Friends to Lovers, Hurt/Comfort, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, Jealous Dazai Osamu (Bungou Stray Dogs), M/M, Mutual Pining, Nakahara Chuuya Needs a Hug (Bungou Stray Dogs), Nakahara Chuuya is Bad at Feelings (Bungou Stray Dogs), Nakahara Chuuya is a Good Friend (Bungou Stray Dogs), Not Actually Unrequited Love, Oblivious Dazai Osamu (Bungou Stray Dogs), Oda Sakunosuke Lives (Bungou Stray Dogs), Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Protective Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs), References to Depression, Self-Worth Issues, Slow Burn, Soft Dazai Osamu/Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs), Suicidal Thoughts, Suicide Attempt, Unrequited Love

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Summary:

“So, you went to a pumpkin patch together, which you do every single year, with Chuuya.” Dazai nodded happily. Oda nodded back, speaking slowly to get the point across.

“Chuuya, the same Chuuya who told Ango to ‘go die’ when he complimented his ponytail, agreed to let you compare his hair to every pumpkin you saw, and then proceeded to pay for the one you found that matched, no questions asked. Then, he allowed an employee to say you two were a couple, and even accepted it in front of you. And now you are confused as to why he didn’t correct them.”

Dazai beamed at him and clapped his hands together.

“Exactly! Odasaku you’re always so smart! I knew you would get it!”

Oda just chuckled wryly as Ango pressed his fingers to his temple.

“So what’s the problem then?”, Oda shrugged.

Dazai and Chuuya have been best friends for ten years, attached to the hip even after all of this time. But, what will happen when Chuuya disrupts the precious balance of their friendship by not correcting an assumption that they are a couple? How will Dazai react?

Relationships: Dazai Osamu/Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs)

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1. the annual visit to the pumpkin patch

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! Welcome to my first attempt at writing my comfort ship!! This will be a multi-chapter fic, and I will be adding tags for every new chapter as needed!

Enjoy :)

If there was one time of year that Dazai could say he actually was fully down to be alive for, it was autumn. When October and November rolled around, he was granted every excuse to be as stupidly spooky as possible, wear sweaters and collared shirts like he was a damn academic straight out of Yale, and partake in his favorite annual activity.

What was that activity you might ask? Well, forcing Chuuya to go to pumpkin patches with him so he could compare the orange of the chibi's hair to each pumpkin they found, of course! It truly was the best time of the year.

"Ah, they really outdid themselves this year! This one is almost the same shade! Here, come closer will you?"

They were at the patch right now, surrounded by families picking out their Halloween carving victims and couples taking cheesy photos to send to a bunch of people who didn't care. While some couple was posing a few feet away from him, Dazai was staring at a pumpkin of what had to be the exact shade of the chibi's hair.

Chuuya himself had a tiny pumpkin balanced in his hand to bring back to his apartment as he hopped over a couple of pumpkins to get to Dazai. He grumbled a little to himself as Dazai lifted the medium sized pumpkin to gently tap against the other's head to compare the color. He gasped at the result.

"It's practically a match! He's perfect! I shall name him..."

"If you say 'chibi' or 'chibikko' or some shit I'm not paying anymore-"

“...C.H.”

“-Oh? That’s fine I guess-wait what does it stand for?”

“Chibi Hatrack.”

“*You-!!!*”

Painfully used to being threatened with bodily harm, Dazai simply chuckled and grabbed Chuuya’s fist before it made contact with his face as he balanced Chibi Hatrack on his hip.

“Ah ah ah tiny Chuuya, we are in public! Save the rough housing for the bedroom.” He said with a wink and a laugh as he watched Chuuya sputter.

No matter how many years passed, Chuuya was still Chuuya. Dazai remembers the first time he had opened his door all those ten years ago to a tiny little chibi asking him if he wanted to play frisbee with him. He would never forget the cocky smirk on the other's face as he told him he was here to kick his ass at frisbee, nor the almost bashful smile he gave when Dazai actually agreed to see if he really had bite to his bark or if he was just another bratty kid.

Being from a household where everything had been gray and dull, the fiery red that Chuuya had emitted since the day they met had always been just too tempting to pass up.

For the gifted child clouded by sadness had attached himself to the delinquent child with a heart too big for his tiny body.

From that day onwards, they had developed a sense of co-dependency that led them to going to the same schools, same university, and then working in the same city. It was just the natural order of things. If Chuuya got accepted to a school, Dazai would apply to the same. If Dazai got a job offer in Yokohama, Chuuya would job search there. That’s just how things were. Everyone around them knew them as Dazai and Chuuya (*Excuse me?! it would be Chuuya and Dazai dumbass!*), never the singular. They were and still are a package deal, for one did not come without the other.

And now, twenty-two years old and by no means needing someone to

be attached at the hip to anymore, the two of them were still spending every possible moment together, even living just two buildings away from the other, despite the fact that most of Dazai's belongings were at Chuuya's apartment rather than his own anyway.

As they started walking toward the front of the patch and Dazai watched Chuuya's face go from that same fiery red to a more muted pink, he could barely ignore the ache in his chest at the sight.

Part of Dazai was terrified that one day it was all going to stop.

That one day Chuuya would get tired of all of the stupid stuff Dazai made him partake in, or get bored of the same banter and antics that they always have done and decide to look elsewhere for a best friend. Sure, Dazai had Odasaku, Ango, and his coworkers, but Chuuya was Chuuya. And Dazai wasn't Dazai without Chuuya.

Because without Chuuya, where did that leave Dazai?

"-and I was like, fuck no! He's the one who stole the last cookie! Look, I'm not going to act like I'm above beating up a random bystander over a cookie and he even had the audacity to take the s'mores one! Hirotsu made them and I would give my left nut for one of those. Hell, I'd give my left nut for Hirotsu I mean-Dazai? Are you even listening to me?"

Chuuya had been rambling about some stupid story about work while Dazai had been walking on auto-pilot. Realizing he had been lost in his thoughts, he turned to his companion (more like looked down upon his companion) and smiled.

"Hmm such a brute my little chibi is. You couldn't have, oh I don't know, asked him for the cookie?"

"It's the principle, Dazai. He looked me in the eyes as he took it. It was like he knew what he was doing to me."

"So what, you were going to beat the shit out of him at a work event just to get the last cookie?"

"You really weren't listening. It was the *s'mores* one, Dazai."

“So, what you’re saying is, you had the capacity to kill him, but decided beating him up was the better option.”

“For legal reasons I’m not going to comment further on that. But I was merciful, to say the least.”

Dazai giggled as Chuuya took out his wallet to pay for both of their pumpkins. It was an unspoken tradition to switch off paying for their outings, and Dazai had paid for the two blue and red sparkly hats Chuuya had wanted at the flea market they went to last weekend. The moment Chuuya had laid his stunning blue eyes on the hats Dazai had been doomed. They were absolutely hideous and Dazai had complained dramatically every second that he had to wear his own blue sparkly one, but the bright smile Chuuya had on his face the entire time had been worth every penny.

The worker smiled at Chuuya as they handed him the change and brightly said, “I hope you have a wonderful day, you are truly a lovely couple! It’s not everyday that you see two people so happy!”

Now, this wasn’t the first time they had been mistaken for a couple, by any means. So, what Dazai assumed was going to happen was Chuuya was going to pop a blood vessel at the insinuation and proceed to throw his newly purchased pumpkin at the head of this poor, well-meaning employee.

That’s what Dazai had predicted, at least.

So he could only stare, awestruck, as Chuuya not only didn’t throw the pumpkin at the cashier, but he didn’t even look angry.

In fact, Chuuya looked nervous, scratching at the back of his neck as he simply replied, “Thank you. Have a wonderful holiday.” and then proceeded to practically speed walk back to the car, leaving a shocked Dazai in the dust.

Once he recovered, he nodded his head in apology to the waiting couple behind him as he ran after his chibi to find him already in the driver’s seat, telling him to ‘shut the fuck up’ when he hadn’t even said anything. In the silence of the car ride home, Dazai’s mind was whirling with what just happened.

“Chuuya didn’t deny us being a couple at the pumpkin patch.”

Oda looked up from where he was nursing his whiskey to the lost face of his hopeless friend, who had the audacity to even make his bottom lip tremble. Ango choked into his own glass as Oda set down his and sighed.

“And how do you feel about that?” He asked, patient as ever. The bartender had a secretive smile on his face as he pretended, like always, that he wasn’t listening to the trio’s conversation.

It wasn't the first time Chuuya’s name had come from the youngest's mouth and definitely would not be the last.

Dazai looked like he was thinking about it for a second before he confidently stated, “I have no clue.”

Ango adjusted his glasses as he blankly repeated, “Let’s get this straight. Chuuya...didn’t deny you were a couple...when you were spending time at a pumpkin patch together?”

Dazai crossed his arms as he huffed, “Ango! You need to learn how to listen better! It was for our annual pumpkin patch visit where I get to critique if the shade of the pumpkins match his hair!”

His face shifted from scolding to lovestruck as he recalled, “They usually can’t get the exact shade of orange, but the farmer’s really outdid themselves this year! Chibi had looked so flustered when I compared him to the pumpkin he bought for me. It was like a mini Chuuya! It was truly disgusting!”

Ango and Oda just blankly stared at him, now feeling as hopeless as Dazai. They had always felt sympathy for Chuuya, but now more than ever did they feel the need to send the redhead their condolences.

Oda stopped Dazai’s ramblings with a gentle hand to his shoulder.

“So, you went to a pumpkin patch together, which you do every single year, with Chuuya.” Dazai nodded happily. Oda nodded back,

speaking slowly to get the point across.

“Chuuya, the same Chuuya who told Ango to ‘go die’ when he complimented his ponytail, agreed to let you compare his hair to every pumpkin you saw, and then proceeded to pay for the one you found that matched, no questions asked. Then, he allowed an employee to say you two were a couple, and even accepted it in front of you. And now you are confused as to why he didn’t correct them.”

Dazai beamed at him and clapped his hands together.

“Exactly! Odasaku you’re always so smart! I knew you would get it!”

Oda just chuckled wryly as Ango pressed his fingers to his temple.

“So what’s the problem then?”, Oda shrugged.

Once again Dazai’s face became one of concentration as he thought out loud, ”I just don’t understand why he didn’t react how he usually does. I fully expected him to throw the pumpkin and blush all cutely like he usually does. It was like he was trying to see how I would react to him being okay with us being a couple...”, and then Dazai gasped dramatically, even going as far to put his hands over his mouth in his shock.

Ango and Oda were both immediately on the edges of their seats, thinking that this was the moment they had waited for. The moment that Dazai finally acknowledged that he and Chuuya-

“He’s pranking me!”

Ah.

They both physically deflated, with Ango tiredly asking, ”How on earth did you reach that conclusion?”

“He’s trying to get a rise out of me! He knew that I would predict him throwing a tantrum at the employee’s insinuation and wanted to make me look like a fool! That silly chibi...thinking he can outsmart me...oh he’s going to get his, heh”, Ango started shaking in response to the pure malice in the younger male’s aura, while Oda just went back to drinking his whiskey, too old and too tired to deal with this

anymore.

There was one thing he was curious about, however. He turned to Dazai and asked, "What do you plan on doing then?"

Dazai slowly turned to Oda, evil smirk on full display, and replied,

"I'm going to make everyone think we are an actual couple. That will show the chibi who's in charge." He chuckled darkly.

"This means *war*."

Notes for the Chapter:

Yes, I know. Dazai is an idiot.

Thanks for reading! :) I actually have most of this already written, so I plan to update regularly! Any feedback is always appreciated!!

2. A plan set in motion

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi again! I just wanted to say thank you for all the kudos and comments, I got a little emotional when I saw how many people had read my work already! It means the world to me!

I hope you enjoy :)

Also, just as a warning, I have never played pool in my life, so if I got the rules wrong, my bad. I tried my best lol

"This means war."

With his plan in mind, Dazai giggled manically the whole way to the Starbucks that he was meeting Chuuya at during their lunch break--the time that they had asked both of their bosses to allot so that they could spend their lunch together everyday.

Other patrons were looking at him like he was crazy as he opened the clear doors and his eyes scanned the room for his intended target. He forced himself to downgrade his laughter to a simple smile when he caught sight of familiar orange hair at the front of the line.

Commence Operation S.o.S.: Smooch of Surprise.

As nonchalantly as he could, Dazai approached where Chuuya was, seeing the other turn slightly in recognition, only to then turn back to the cashier asking for his order. He assumed Dazai would come up, and most likely didn't even need to ask Dazai for what his order would be since he's had to order it so many times in the past.

Perfect.

"-one pumpkin spice latte and then a caramel macchiato with extra caramel drizzle?"

“Sure thing, Chuuya. That will be \$7.50 pl-”

In that moment, Dazai slammed a ten dollar bill on the counter and proceeded to wrap his arm around Chuuya's shoulders as the other froze in his place.

He was fully aware that should Chuuya feel the need to, he could easily push Dazai off and end him right then and there, and Dazai would let him.

Since Chuuya had yet to attack him, he considered that a green light and moved forward with his plan. With a sickly sweet smile and a slight tilt to his head, he coyly said right to Chuuya,

“This one is on me, *sweetheart* .”

"The *fuck*?"

Chuuya looked at him like he had lobsters growing out of his ears, the barista going silent as well, making the smile on Dazai's face grow even wider.

Time for the final strike.

With the leverage he had on Chuuya, he pulled him closer and brushed away the soft hair that was blocking the full sight of his cheeks, watching Chuuya's eyebrow raise slightly as he proceeded to lean down and place a gentle kiss on the smooth surface.

He felt more than heard Chuuya's intake of breath, and allowed his own breath to fan across the other's face for a second in response. He then leaned even further into Chuuya's space and whispered into his ear,

“Ah such language! Don't worry. I'll find the table. I'll be waiting for you, *dearest*.”

And as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, Dazai let go of Chuuya, put his hands back into his pockets, and made a beeline for the nearest booth.

When he sat down he saw the barista putting his cash into the

register, but that meant nothing when he noticed Chuuya was still looking at him, with the most hopeful and besotted look on his face.

For some reason, Dazai felt his cheeks heat at the sight and felt something skip in his body, but it probably had to do with how proud he was that he had gotten his revenge.

The barista looked from the idiot giggling in the booth to the shocked face of one of her favorite regulars, “It’s really sweet, you know, how often you guys buy each other drinks. I had always wondered if you two were dating.” She said as she handed him his change.

When Chuuya turned back to look at her, he had an oddly sad smile on his face that made her do a double-take. He wryly replied,

“Yeah, me too.”

Saturday was guys night.

That being said, Oda, Dazai, and Ango always made plans for Saturday nights to do something fun together, and this Saturday was no exception.

However, Dazai had other plans for *this* particular Saturday.

As an honored guest, Dazai invited Chuuya to come to the billiards bar that they had been wanting to go to for some time. It wasn’t the first time that Chuuya had joined, and Oda and Ango had always liked Chuuya despite Chuuya’s unsavory nicknames for the latter, so it didn’t take any real convincing for them to be fine with the addition. Plus, it was easier to play pool with four people.

More importantly though, it also allowed Dazai to move forward with his plan.

With what must have looked like an evil smirk on his face, Dazai opened the bar door for the remaining trio as his mind began to whirl with excitement. Chuuya raised an eyebrow at him skeptically, but didn't say anything other than 'thank you' as he passed Dazai into the bar.

Commencing Revenge Plan Part Two.

As they made their way into the bar, Oda was walking next to Dazai and Ango and Chuuya were chatting a little ahead of them.

Oda was saying something to Dazai but the latter wasn't listening, watching Ango start fiddling with his glasses as Chuuya openly laughed at whatever Ango had said to him.

Since when was Ango a comedian? Chuuya never laughed at Dazai's jokes and he was actually funny, damn it!

Dazai gasped as Chuuya then threw a hand onto the other's shoulder, furthering Ango's distress, and causing Dazai to quickly decide to start his plan a little early.

The excited energy was making his stomach twist at the sight of Chuuya and Ango being all friendly and touchy, of course. It was best to get this show on the road.

Leaving Oda in the dust, which he seemed oddly okay with, Dazai, super calmly and totally not like lightning at all, started walking faster to catch up with the other two. As they both turned to look at him, Dazai gently placed a hand at the small of Chuuya's back and leaned in close as he said,

"Chuuya, you have to be gentle with Ango! He is but a dainty little flower!"

While Ango sputtered, Chuuya quickly retracted his hand from the other's shoulder and stiffened in Dazai's hold. He was strangely silent, and surprisingly didn't promise immediate bodily harm to his person. That was a good sign.

Before Dazai could say anything further, Oda breezed past them, slightly bumping Dazai further into Chuuya's personal space, who

caught Dazai with a tight grip to his waist. Dazai unconsciously leaned into the hold.

Oda then turned back to them with a tiny- *oh, he was up to something* - smile as he said, "I'd say it's drink time, what do you say Chuuya?"

"Fucking, YES".

Chuuya immediately broke out of Dazai's hold to then fall into step with Oda, who looked down at him with a kind smile before he turned to Dazai and Ango, "I trust you two can handle getting a pool table. Chuuya and I will get some drinks. Don't wait up."

As the two redheads walked away, Dazai couldn't help but stare bewilderedly at their backs and wonder,

Just what is he up to?

Ango seemed to have recovered as he adjusted his glasses and said, "I am sorry for allowing him to touch me in a tender manner, Dazai-kun. It would be in our best interest to get a table fast so that neither of us are strangled by Nakahara-kun, furthering both of our distresses."

Hilarious!! Dazai just sighed as he trudged along with Ango to an empty table as he replied despondently, "How could you hold out on me like this! Traitor! You truly are a great comedian Ango!!"

Chuuya glanced back at the helpless duo before turning to his companion, asking, "Why did you do that?"

Leaning against the bar, Oda just continued to smile at him before replying,

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

Chuuya huffed as he leaned against the bar as well, resting his cheek in his hand. He seemed to think about something for a second before he bit his lip and shyly asked, “You know, don’t you?”

Oda’s grin turned more genuine as he fully turned to Chuuya, who looked as lost as he had sounded. He placed his hand on the other’s shoulder as he replied,

“It isn’t selfish to wish for happiness, you know.”

When Chuuya and Oda made their way to the table with two whiskeys in each hand, Ango and Dazai were in the middle of debating who would be on which team.

As Chuuya handed Dazai his drink, Dazai couldn’t help the smile that graced his features as he allowed their hands to touch longer than what was needed. Chuuya smiled back, just as gently.

All part of the plan, of course.

“It would make the most sense for Nakahara-kun to be on a team with either Oda or I, considering you two would be at an advantage from the start since you are both competitive to a fault”, Ango pointed out as he took his own drink from Oda’s hand.

“But Ango!! I can’t let you be on a team with the chibi! I can accept that you are a comedian but this is where I draw the line! He’s mine!”, Dazai replied petulantly, unaware of the steam coming out of the ears of said chibi next to him.

Deciding that he, once again, had to be the adult in the situation, Oda took a sip and ended the debate with a tone of finality.

“It makes sense for Chuuya and Dazai to be on a team together, since

Dazai is the one that invited him. Ango, you're stuck with me."

Seemingly fine with the outcome, Ango just sighed and followed Oda to get the required equipment for their game. Since Ango and Oda had taken the initiative to get the cue sticks out and set up the balls, Dazai chose that moment to make use of his plan. He turned to the still short-circuiting Chuuya and asked,

"You've played before, right?"

Seemingly having to have regained consciousness, Chuuya replied dazedly, "Yeah, it's been a while though."

Dazai hummed at this for a second, just who did the chibi play with?

"Well, I can't have you holding me back, so I'll be the *bigger* person and show you how to do it!"

"You bastard, I can do it on my own! It's not like it's that hard of a concept to grasp!"

"You'd be surprised, what with the brain cells you have lost from that ugly hat of yours."

"*You!--*"

Besides, his plan was dependent on Chuuya not knowing how to play the game well. It was quite simple, really. Chuuya would lean over the table to make his hit, and Dazai would press up behind him, placing one hand on his hip to balance him, and the other hand would cover the hand on the cue stick. He would whisper in the other's ear as he slowly rocked the both of them forward to make the correct hit. He had seen it in a movie once.

It was foolproof.

"Alright you two, grab your sticks and let's get this going. You're up first." Oda had come to the rescue yet again, knocking Dazai out of

his thoughts while handing them both a cue stick.

Foolproof. *Yeah* .

“I’ll go first.”, Chuuya responded, making Dazai glow in his excitement.

He watched as Chuuya tied his hair up in a loose bun and made his way to the front of the triangle, bending like so in order to get the proper angle. His tongue was licking between his lips in concentration, while Dazai’s eyes trailed from his tongue to his rarely bare neck, all the way to where his hips were...

...in the correct place?

CRACK

Dazai watched in both awe and horror as Chuuya made a perfect break shot, one of their balls going straight into the pockets, earning them points on just the first shot.

Holy *shit* .

All three of the remaining men’s jaws were slacked in shock, one of them for a completely different reason than the others. He had never seen someone get that perfect of a break shot, let alone himself.

Was he just hustled? Did he just get hustled?! *By a chibi?!*

“What the fuck?”

That...wasn’t what Dazai had meant to say.

Chuuya chuckled smugly as he straightened himself, the smirk on his face growing by the second. When he made eye contact with Dazai, he could see the unbridled amusement swimming in those baby blues, making his face feel like it was on fire.

This wasn't part of the plan. It did make him feel a little better that Oda and Ango still had their jaws to the floor like a couple of buffoons, though.

Chuuya maneuvered the end of his cue stick so that it went under Dazai's chin as he said, "I said it had been a while since I've played, not that I didn't know how," He did a meaningful once over of Dazai's body as he continued,

"It would serve you well to keep your mind out of the gutter... Osamu."

He then used the hold he had on the cue stick to gently shut Dazai's open mouth, and proceeded to walk past him, chuckling as he lightly tapped him on the ass with the other end of the cue stick.

Ango regretted giving Dazai his favorite handkerchief for his nose that night, for he was never truly able to get the bloodstains completely out.

Notes for the Chapter:

In the next chapter onwards things get more serious, so keep an eye out for that update and I will add tags as needed!

Thank you again for reading, and feedback is always appreciated! :)

3. This wasn't part of the plan

Notes for the Chapter:

Happy Valentines Day!!

Thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy
:)

*[slug <3] That new bookstore I was telling you about finally opened up.
Want to check it out?*

[me] Hmm idk I'm pretty busy

[slug <3] what are you even doing?

[me] existing. it's very tiring

[slug <3] Fuck you

[slug <3] ...I'll pick you up in ten

Dazai couldn't help but smile to himself at that response. He genuinely did want to go to the bookstore with Chuuya, it was on their list of fall activities to do before Halloween hit. He just liked being difficult, really.

It was honestly more shocking that Dazai hadn't been in Chuuya's apartment when Chuuya had wanted to ask him to go. Nowadays, Dazai really only went to his own apartment to sleep and occasionally do his work.

Chuuya must have just kept the thermostat up higher than he did, because it was always so much warmer and more inviting in there.

Sure, he had his plan and had been trying to mess with the chibi more often, but the other gave it back just as hard, if not harder.

He sighed as he thought about that night at the billiards bar, Chuuya leaning over the pool table, knocking the ball into the pocket, solidifying their victory as a team. He remembered the way Chuuya had thrown his arms around his neck, how he could feel the other's smile as he put his own arms around Chuuya's waist and had spun them around a bit in their drunken cheer.

Not that he thought about it that much.

Staring at his closet for what to wear, he decided to be soft that day and wear the black cable knit sweater he had been wanting to wear with a white collared shirt underneath and just simple black jeans. It was a bookstore, okay, he wanted to look academic.

When he caught his own eyes in the mirror in his closet, he couldn't help but fiddle with his hair a bit. Usually he just let his hair do its thing, what with the almost behead like state it was constantly in suiting him just fine. But for some reason, today he wanted to look nice.

He kept playing with it, attempting to tame the beast upon his head, but it wasn't cooperating in the slightest. With a huff, he dropped his hands back to his sides with an audible slap of frustration. He felt anxious all of the sudden, and lifted his hands one last time to try and figure out something new. It wasn't until he lifted his hand to his left ear that he was suddenly struck with a sense of *deja vu*.

A gloved hand, softer than it had any right to be, brushing his hair behind his ear, tucking it there.

"You really should wear your hair like this more often. It suits you."

Dazai had been getting ready for a date. They had been freshmen in college at the time, dipping their toes into the dating scene.

Well, Dazai had been, Chuuya would always claim that he didn't date, despite his many admirers.

When Dazai would ask him about it, Chuuya just said that he didn't know what admirers Dazai was talking about, not realizing that Dazai knew the rumors about Chuuya turning down every single person who ever had the guts to ask him out.

If Chuuya hadn't felt the need to tell him the truth, Dazai wasn't going to press. It couldn't have been important if he hadn't felt the need to tell his best friend. They told each other everything.

Despite his current flirtatious nature, back then, Dazai didn't have that same confidence he did now. Back in high school, he had been more inclined to be focused on his own death rather than whether or not someone liked him, and it showed in the fact that Chuuya had been the only one to stick around.

By the time he had gotten to college, he had felt like he had lost his wild teenage years to depression, and had gone on endless dates in order to make up for what he had seen as lost time.

Dazai had been fiddling with his hair nervously before one of those dates, just as he was doing now.

"What if she doesn't like me? I mean, I'm a catch, so of course she will, but what if she doesn't?", Dazai asked, breathless from his anxiety.

Chuuya looked toward their shared window, red hair illuminated by the setting sun outside, face unreadable as he said, "You have nothing to worry about. Trust me. You said she seemed excited when you asked her, yeah?"

It wasn't the first time that Dazai had envied Chuuya's easy confidence, especially his confidence when it came to Dazai. He huffed to himself as he continued to mess with his hair, his hands getting shakier by the second.

For the first time in a long time, he was scared of someone else's opinion of him. What if he said something stupid? What if she had said yes because she pitied him? What if-

Suddenly, a gloved pair of hands settled onto his own, gently removing

them from his head, with one then moving to tuck his hair behind his left ear.

Chuuya's expression earlier had been closed off and unreadable, but looking at him in that moment, Dazai found himself staring with wide eyes.

Chuuya's pretty blue eyes looked slightly wet and shiny, with a pained smile on his face despite the open fondness and warmth radiating off of him.

Dazai felt his heart clench at the melancholic look on the other's face. He felt like he had missed something. He knew things had been bad at home for the other, had something happened?

"You don't need to be so nervous. Of course she'll like you. Despite how much of a pain in my ass you are, what's there not to like?"

A gloved hand, softer than it had any right to be, brushed his hair behind his ear again, tucking it there.

"You really should wear your hair like this more often. It suits you."

With that memory in mind, Dazai shyly tucked his hair behind one ear, just as Chuuya had done all those years ago. It didn't feel as soft and warm as it had when Chuuya had done it, but it looked nice nonetheless. He couldn't stop the small smile he gave his own reflection at the sight.

He'd come a long way.

But he'd always had the same person at his side, regardless. A silly chibi who had always cared just a little too much.

There was a sudden loud knock on his front door.

"Shitty Dazai! Open the damn door!"

Dazai's smile grew tenfold at the sound of Chuuya's yelling. He ran to the door, slightly breathless as he opened it to the sight of a comically pissed off Chuuya. He was also in a white collared shirt under a black sweater that was clearly way too big on him, with his hair tied up in a high ponytail and ripped black skinny jeans that practically melted into his skin. He was wearing the little sword earrings Dazai had bought him for his birthday two years ago. Dazai's heart clenched in his chest.

They were matching.

When they made eye contact, the hard edges of Chuuya's expression softened, leaving him with an irritated grimace, eyes soft with fondness.

Dazai didn't know why he suddenly felt the urge to cry at the sight. So, instead of facing that dilemma, he quickly threw his arms around his Chuuya and buried his face into the small shoulder below him. Chuuya squeaked slightly at the contact but wasn't hesitant to wrap his arms around Dazai back, gently reaching up a hand to pet at the spot where his neck met his hair.

"God, I can't believe we are fucking matching. I think I'm going to be sick."

Dazai chuckled lightly at the breathlessness and happiness that painted Chuuya's tone, despite the fact that it should've been insulting.

Despite his short fuse and the way he had been treated in the past, Chuuya truly did not possess a single mean bone in his tiny body. The reminder of his past made Dazai hold on just a little tighter.

Dazai wasn't the only one that faced demons behind closed doors.

"So, are we just going to sit here like war-torn lovers or are we actually going to read some damn books?"

Ah, there it was. When Chuuya wanted to ask if he was okay without asking if he was okay.

With one last squeeze he let the other go, who gazed at him worriedly behind his mask of irritation. He didn't notice Chuuya's eyes widen as he took in the other's appearance fully, however.

"Yes, yes, chibikko. We must do what we can to help your tiny brain cells to grow back from lack of use."

What Dazai expected was Chuuya to blow up at him over this, breaking whatever spell they had both been under from the moment that he had opened the door.

Chuuya had always been unpredictable in his predictability, however.

What Dazai didn't expect was for Chuuya to reach up and gently trace with his hand where Dazai had tucked his hair, just as warm as he had done the first time. As distracting as it was to have such a soft touch on his face, he couldn't look away from Chuuya's expression, and he felt himself lean into the touch at the sight.

Chuuya's eyes were once again wet and shiny, but the smile on his face was so small and genuine, filled with something he had never truly seen on Chuuya's face so openly.

He looked happy.

"I was right. It really does suit you."

Dazai felt his whole body burn, and he couldn't stop himself before he leaned down and kissed the crown of Chuuya's head, immediately going inside after to grab his keys and wallet. When he turned back Chuuya was as red as he himself felt, which helped the ease of the smile on his face as he traced the spot Chuuya had on his hair and excitedly said,

"Well! Those books aren't going to read themselves!"

The bookstore really was cute. Chuuya had been right to take them there.

After the disaster that was Dazai being forced to ride on Chuuya's death machine-" *It's just a motorcycle, dumbass. It's not my fault you're a big baby. Want me to go extra slow little diaper boy?*"- they had walked into a small store surrounded by little flowers and ivy with the scent of coffee all around them.

Oh yeah, this was nice.

"I'll be over here if you need me." Chuuya said once they walked in, only for Dazai to poke at his cheeks as he teased,

"Hmm, going to find some disgustingly sappy poetry, I presume?"

"The only thing here that's disgusting is you, asshole."

"Ooooo Chuuya's feisty today! Maybe we should just stick together. I'll come with you."

Chuuya looked at him skeptically as he asked, "What? Are you over your little tantrum you had, what, five minutes ago?"

"Excuse you, I'm just making sure my feisty little dog is kept on a leash, of course. I'm honestly shocked they let you in here! I must be a good pet owner and make sure you stay on your best behavior."

"That head of yours is just decoration for hot air, is that it?"

"Is it a pretty decoration, at least?"

"What? I mean yeah sure you're pretty but that doesn't mean-"Chuuya choked all of the sudden.

"P-pretty stupid, is what I meant!"

"Good save, chibi." Dazai teased, acting like his cheeks didn't feel

warmer than usual.

“Shut the fuck up.”

While Dazai wasn't the biggest fan of poetry, he loved how much Chuuya adored it.

The way Chuuya had always described poetry, was that it was lines of words that alone made no sense, but together meant everything. He said that about any work in literature, but poetry was and will always be what Chuuya gravitated toward.

He wrote a lot back when they were younger, which he used to tease the other about relentlessly, but recently Dazai hasn't seen him write anything. Despite the teasing, Dazai truly loved hearing his poems, for he was very talented. And despite the teasing, Chuuya still read them to him. It was a show of trust that Dazai cherished.

Part of him was happy that Chuuya didn't write the same poetry he did before, what with the circumstances in which he wrote about, but his more selfish side wished he could hear more.

“Hey, Chuuya.”

Chuuya dramatically looked around him, and took the time to even pretend to clean out his ears as he said with the shocked face, “Did you just call me by my actual name? Am I dead? You poisoned that coffee didn't you?”

Dazai deadpanned, “Ha ha ha very funny.”

He bit at his lip a little before asking,

“Why did you stop reading your poetry to me?”

Chuuya dropped the book in his hand in his shock, which made Dazai's stomach drop to the floor as well. So he had been writing poetry, he just hadn't been sharing it with him.

He shouldn't be hurt, it's private and Chuuya is allowed to have a life outside of him.

So, why did it hurt so bad for there to be something he didn't know about Chuuya?

Chuuya put the book back, seemingly understanding the change in atmosphere as he asked, "Why do you ask?"

A deflection. Dazai's stomach fell further.

Usually what Dazai would do in a situation of possible vulnerability, would be to say something hurtful or cold in order to switch the point of vulnerability onto the other person.

But he was trying not to be that person anymore. And this was Chuuya. Chuuya had been told enough hurtful things to last him two lifetimes. He didn't need to hear anymore.

Dazai looked back down at his book to avoid eye contact as he quietly admitted, "I just-I miss hearing you read them. I-I was worried I did something to make you think you couldn't read them to me anymore."

"Oh, Osamu."

Dazai's neck snapped back up at the sheer emotion in Chuuya's voice as he said his given name. He couldn't determine what the emotion was, but the air was thick with it.

Chuuya looked at him with a tender smile, a smile that he had only ever seen the other direct at him and him alone. The weight in his stomach started to lift as Chuuya replied,

"You could never do anything wrong in my eyes, unfortunately."

Dazai's eyes widened as Chuuya bent down to pick up a new book and sighed,

"It wasn't that I didn't want to share them, I trust you, it's just...I didn't know how you would react."

That was odd.

"Why would you worry about how I would react?"

Chuuya seemed to have a debate with himself over that question, and when he looked back up at Dazai, the look on his face sent Dazai into a memory he tried not to think about too often.

“I don’t care if you hate me for it, go ahead and resent me, but you can’t stop me from spending everyday trying to convince you that at least someone wants you in this shitty world here with them.”

Because for some fucked up reason...”

Chuuya was scared.

But...why would he be scared of his reaction? Of Dazai in general?

Chuuya was quiet when he replied,

“I’m just overreacting. Once I finish my most recent one I’ll read it to you, okay? I promise you didn’t do anything, I’m just being weird.”

Dazai didn’t feel satisfied by this answer in the slightest, but he decided not to press. If it was important, then Chuuya would tell him. They told each other everything.

...Right?

The next few minutes were met with silence, as Dazai let the topic drop as not to create a weird atmosphere during the rest of their outing. He genuinely had been excited to go to the bookstore, and to spend some time with Chuuya outside of their apartments.

“What are you reading?”, Chuuya asked while stepping into his personal space to get a closer look.

Dazai smiled, helpfully leaning down slightly to put the book into

tiny Chuuya's view, who growled a little but didn't say anything as he scooted close enough that their shoulders were touching to look at the book too.

"It's a book of puns!"

"As if it wasn't bad enough that we are matching. You just love to torture me, is that it?"

Dazai looked down at Chuuya, confused as to why he had sounded so happy when he said that. Looking back at the book, Dazai exclaimed,

"Look at this one! 'I once knew a woman who was a taser. She was *stunning* !'"

"..."

"My dog can do magic tricks. It's a *labracadabrador* !' Hmm, why can't my dog do any tricks?"

"Because you don't fucking have one."

"Hmm, your barking says otherwise!"

Chuuya growled as he elbowed Dazai in the stomach, pushing more laughs out of him.

Out of the corner of his eye, Dazai saw a mother and her child looking at them, with the mother smiling gently at him as the child stared curiously at Chuuya's earrings. He hadn't realized they had an audience.

He realized in that moment that what he was doing with Chuuya wasn't even part of the plan. It was natural. There wasn't any need to play up the couple thing, but they were doing it anyway. He looked down at Chuuya holding the pun book and occasionally chuckling to himself, having never moved out of Dazai's personal space.

It wasn't part of the plan but...

Dazai wrapped an arm around Chuuya's waist and rested his head on top of the other's, pulling him closer to look at the book as well and ask him which ones had made that pretty laugh of his come out.

Well, he didn't ask that *exactly*, but you get the point, don't you?

Dazai was starting to wonder if there had ever been a plan to begin with.

Chuuya's face was warmer than it had been before, but he looked content in Dazai's grip as they continued to read the book together and laugh occasionally.

"I think we should grab some and read them outside, don't you?", Chuuya had asked after they finished the pun book, staring past the window to the store.

Dazai glanced outside as well. The trees were finally changing colors, and there was an empty garden table for two, covered with leaves of reds and oranges that signaled the rebirth of a new season.

To think that back then, he had thought he had already seen everything the world had to offer him.

"Why didn't you just say so!", Dazai exclaimed, using his grip on the other to pull them both toward the cash register. Chuuya had accumulated three poetry books while Dazai only had one novel, but when they had both placed their books on the counter, Dazai was the one to reach for his wallet. Chuuya had paid for his pumpkin, so despite the fact that Dazai had paid for their coffees, he decided to keep his generosity going.

He couldn't stop himself from commenting, "You paid for the pumpkins, so now I gotta pay for *my* pumpkin!"

Chuuya sputtered at that, and the employee giggled, but Dazai

couldn't ignore the fact that besides how embarrassed he was, Chuuya started playing with his hair at the nickname, which he only did when he was flattered.

Oh. Chuuya *liked* being called pumpkin.

Dazai was going to pocket that information for later use, yes he was.

Once Dazai had their books in hand, they made their way to the table. Chuuya brushed the leaves off before Dazai settled the books in the middle, both of them naturally falling into one side of the table.

“Not to toot my own horn, but this was a great idea.”, Chuuya proudly announced as he sat down and stretched out his legs.

Dazai chuckled lightly as he took his own seat and crossed his legs.

While Chuuya began reading his book, Dazai tried to read his, only for his eyes to keep falling on Chuuya instead.

Chuuya had a red leaf stuck in his hair, but Dazai couldn't find it in him to tell him. The urge to reach over and pull it out was strong, strong enough that his hand twitched on his lap. He wanted to see the look on Chuuya's face as he reached over to gently remove it, and how his eyes would widen when Dazai would use the grip he already had on his head to bring him closer to his own face, closing his eyes slowly...

He was suddenly struck with an emotion that he didn't know the name to. He knew that it was always present around Chuuya, and it was what tainted the air of every space Chuuya occupied.

It was warm.

It was in his apartment, on his motorcycle, on the earrings that Dazai bought, and it was in his hair.

It was in his smile, his laughter, and most prominently, it was in his eyes.

Dazai tapped at the hand Chuuya had resting on the table, causing him to look up from his book.

Like always, that warmth was in his eyes as Chuuya gazed questioningly at the other.

He couldn't say it out loud, not yet. So he just simply took Chuuya's hand in his and kept it there while they read. But in his head he couldn't help but think,

You've convinced me, Chuuya.

Notes for the Chapter:

Next chapter we will be getting the background of the memory that has been hinted at multiple times this chapter...

...so stay tuned for that update!

As always, thank you for reading and feedback is always appreciated! :)

4. There's no one I would trust more to help me than you

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi again! Welcome to a very important chapter!!

IMPORTANT TW: depression, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempt, implied/slightly referenced child abuse.

This chapter begins with a flashback to a suicide attempt, so please keep that in mind before reading. If that is too difficult for you to read, I completely understand and you can go ahead and skip to the break indicated with 'Present Day'.

I just want to emphasize that you are never alone, no matter what.

As always, thank you for reading and I hope you enjoy! :)

You've convinced me, Chuuya.

-----*Seven Years Ago*

It had been the first time that Dazai had tried to end his life for real.

Sure, he joked about it most of the time, but everyone had assumed that's just what it was. Jokes.

The only person who had ever worried about the implications of what those jokes meant, had been his next door neighbor, who he had been begrudgingly friends with for the past three years. Chuuya was a jock type, hotheaded and preferring to use his fists to end arguments. He was, in Dazai's opinion, a muscles for brains. He was rough around the edges and could beat up dudes three times his size,

easily.

Dazai had fun with Chuuya since going past his tough exterior, the other was strangely gullible and easy to tease. But, after the first time Chuuya had seen what Dazai tried so hard to keep hidden under his bandages, Dazai was surprised at the tenderness the other could show, as he could feel the way the other had started to watch him more closely.

Worry was an emotion that Dazai had never been the recipient of.

While it had been fun to have someone to make fun of rather than wallow in the recesses of his own mind, the fact of the matter was even ignoring the other's worry and care, sometimes Chuuya reminded him of everything he wasn't.

Sure, Dazai had a lot going for him, and by no means was he envious of the other's athleticism, but Chuuya was something that he would never be no matter how hard he tried.

A good person.

Angry that someone could be so bright in his dim world, it made Dazai's words toward the other more harmful than he meant them to be. He didn't want some stupid chibi making him question what little he liked about himself, so he kept him at an arm's length, despite his fascination with the other.

But Chuuya had always been stubborn. No matter how many harmful words or dismissive actions he sent the other out of spite, Chuuya still found a way to care about things that his tiny brain couldn't comprehend. Dazai was tired of dealing with the other breathing down his neck constantly just because he had a few scars. He was fine. He always was.

Everything was *fine* .

But life could only be just fine for so long before he began to question

the point of it all.

Tonight was the night that Dazai was going to actually try and finish his time on what he saw as a useless planet.

It wasn't that Dazai hated his life. By all simple means, his life was *fine*. His parents weren't around much, but they made sure that he knew he was loved despite that. He did well in school without trying. His teachers and most adults liked him. He never had to worry about money. He didn't really have friends, but it was because what little people wanted to be friends with him, he purposefully scared off. He had Chuuya, and for a long time, that was enough.

But sometimes it doesn't take a sad backstory or a painful past to make someone wish they weren't here anymore. And it's just as difficult, if not more, dealing with the guilt of feeling such a way when by all means otherwise, they should be 'happy'.

That guilt and emptiness had been eating away at him for as long as he could remember. He was tired, simple as that.

At fifteen, he felt he had seen all he needed to in this world.

His parents weren't home that night working at the hospital, and Chuuya was in his own home. Dazai was alone, and he could do whatever he wanted.

It was simple. Down too much medication for his body to handle and let the magic do its thing. Simple.

The plan had been going swimmingly. He was completely alone, he had just downed a whole bottle of his father's sleeping pills easily, and was waiting in his room for the outcome, propped up on his bed.

It was somewhat anticlimactic.

He wasn't crying. His hands weren't shaking. This wasn't a movie where suddenly someone would come home and find him last minute.

This was it for him.

Dazai knew of loneliness. The loneliness that ached in one's bones enough that it felt as though he would look down and see a bruise where his heart was supposed to be. The kind that made him feel empty even in a room full of people that he knew cared about him to some degree.

But he had never felt more lonely than in that moment knowing that no one was going to stop him.

He lazily looked out his window for the last time, wondering when the moon had ever been so bright. It felt like it was brightening up his whole room. He had never noticed it before. Had it always been that bright?

Sleepy.

He wondered what they would think when they found him. Chuuya would probably cry.

Chuuya.

He almost felt bad for not saying goodbye to the chibi, but he would understand. Of anyone, Chuuya would understand the most.

So heavy.

Right as Dazai felt his eyes start to close, there was a loud banging noise coming from downstairs that made him flinch as hard as he was able to in his inebriated state.

“Shitty Dazai! Open the damn door!”

...What?

Despite his fatigue, Dazai felt a sense of panic in his heart as he looked over to where he had left his phone on the ground near him.

[slug] *3 missed calls.*

Shit.

Maybe he had been wrong about someone coming at the last minute.

He stared tiredly at his open window, begging to any god out there that Chuuya wouldn't be predictable for once in his life and climb through the window to get to him like he always did when Dazai didn't answer the door. Why hadn't he closed the window?

“God damn piece of shit making me climb up a fucking-”

Dazai knew his fate was sealed the moment orange hair was visible over his windowpane.

With one foot out of the window toward his floor, with his other still outside, Chuuya froze on the spot once his eyes fell to Dazai. He watched as Chuuya's panicked eyes moved from him, to the empty bottle on the floor, back to him.

With heavy eyelids, Dazai tried one last time to joke about this,

“Fancy seeing you here, chibi.”

"Dazai!"

He heard the yell of his name before succumbing to the darkness.

He was alive.

He had gotten his stomach pumped, and a pamphlet with recommendations for therapy had been placed on the nightstand to his right. He wished he had his lighter on him so he could burn it. For the first time in a long time, he actually felt something other than emptiness.

He was pissed.

Unbelievably pissed at the stupid redheaded little shit asleep in a chair next to his hospital bed who just didn't know when to quit.

It was because of Chuuya that he will never get the image out of his head of his parents' faces when they found out that their only son had tried to kill himself.

It was because of Chuuya that he actually found himself regretting making a rash decision when he was left to his own devices, when for years he hadn't felt anything.

But more than anything, he was furious that Chuuya had made the decision for him on whether or not he should be alive. He even had the audacity to be the one to offer to stay with him for the night, since his parents had to go back to work.

He tried not to be hurt by that.

With his anger flaring at the shorty next to him, he grabbed what was closest to him, a cup of water, and promptly threw it at Chuuya. The plastic made a satisfying 'thunk' noise on the others head while shocking him awake from the cold water.

"W-What the fuck?"

"You just had to stick your stinky nose where you shouldn't have, huh?"

Chuuya sputtered at him, clearly not fully awake still, wiping at the water in his hair. Dazai felt his teeth grind as he continued,

“You really are such a stupid dog. Begging at your master’s heels when he doesn’t give you attention.”

“What the hell? For the last time I’m not your damn dog! I was trying to help you, you dick!”

“Helping who? Yourself? It’s not my fault that no one else can tolerate being around you. You should’ve gotten the hint that you were nothing but an annoyance when your own mother said so.” He almost regretted saying that, what with the way Chuuya’s eyes glossed over and his fists clenched on his lap.

Almost.

“What else was I supposed to do, *huh*? Just leave you there? Sorry, but that’s not happening.” Chuuya said as he broke eye contact to look at the nearby wall.

Dazai wasn’t having it. He got out of his hospital bed and stood up tall at his full height over where Chuuya was slightly curling into the chair. Dazai looked down at the other with dark eyes.

“I don’t need you, Chuuya. No one does. You should’ve done what you were supposed to, and leave me be.” He then turned back to his bed, and laid down with his back to the other.

He was supposed to be finding out if there was anything outside of this oxidizing dream of a world, but now he was trapped with the worst outcome.

He was stuck being Dazai Osamu.

They sat in silence for a few seconds. He heard a sigh, and then a voice quietly said, “You can do all you want to push me away but your stupid ass is just going to have to deal with it. I’m not going anywhere.”

Silence. Dazai gripped his pillow tight.

Chuuya sighed again. “...I’m sorry that I didn’t do more for you. That I wasn’t enough to make you realize how important you are. Some best friend I am, huh?”

Best friend?

Dazai felt part of his anger slip away at how tired and sad Chuuya had sounded. He braced himself as he turned back toward the other, surprised to see a determined look on Chuuya's face, despite the bags under his eyes. He was standing at the side of the bed, gazing down at him, just as he had done before to Chuuya.

But instead of vitriol in his gaze, Chuuya just looked heartbroken. Most people would have given up and trembled at the sight of Dazai's hateful gaze, but not Chuuya. Dazai tried not to be reminded that Chuuya was used to being looked at in such a way. Chuuya was all muscle, ready to fight whenever someone even asked.

And yet, at the same time, Chuuya was a painfully loyal being.

"I don't care if you hate me for it, go ahead and resent me, but you can't stop me from spending everyday trying to convince you that at least someone wants you in this shitty world here with them. I know that you don't need me, and I'm not asking you to."

Chuuya then seemed to steal himself for a moment, fisting clenching at his sides, before finishing with,

"Because for some fucked up reason..."

...I need you, Osamu."

Dazai felt his entire body freeze like someone had put ice into his veins. He felt his eyes widen as a small gasp escaped from his mouth. He had always assumed he wasn't needed. That everyone in his life was doing just fine without him, and that's why he thought he could get off easy.

He thought he was expendable, and therefore not needed in anyone's life for the long term. They would be sad at first, sure, but it wouldn't take long for everyone's lives to move forward without his presence. He was easily forgotten.

Just one dot among the billions.

But, he knew Chuuya was being honest. Honesty. It was something that Dazai had always envied about Chuuya. He knew when to be honest, and he allowed himself to be so. Dazai had never been very open.

Chuuya's eyes glossed over again as he begged, "So let me convince you, *please*. All I ask is for you to give me another chance to show you that it's worth it to live."

Chuuya looked to the ground for a moment, eyes downcast, "...I know what it's like to feel as though you have no one." He closed his eyes for a moment, only to shake his head suddenly and throw his head back up determinedly, making eye contact with Dazai again, blue eyes on fire.

"But no matter what, you have me. You're never alone, even when you think you are. *No one* is ever truly alone, I promise. *Please*, just let me convince you."

Chuuya looked so desperate to make him understand, and knowing that despite once again being hurt by the words of someone he cared about, Chuuya was still putting himself in a place of vulnerability. He was scared, but he was opening himself up to possible betrayal anyway. Chuuya was the only person that Dazai could think of being wounded in the long term by the loss should Dazai not be here anymore.

It was with that in mind that Dazai decided that for once, he could try to be half as honest with Chuuya as Chuuya had been with him.

Dazai's eyes glossed over, heart hammering in his chest. He had always worried he was unwanted. He had been cruel to the people who cared about him, wanting to push them away before they could do the same to him. He was terrified that he would lose anything that made him happy the moment he received it, so he had refused to

accept any happiness in fear of the pain that would follow its disappearance.

But Chuuya said he needed him.

And he just wanted to be honest in return. He wasn't suddenly cured of his depression because someone had told him they needed him. He wasn't suddenly happy and okay because he realized that maybe he was more cared for than he had originally realized. He was still depressed, he was still not okay, and he knew that the road ahead was going to be difficult.

But, he was ready to try to be okay. And maybe, he was ready to accept a little help from a chibi with a heart too big for his body.

He was already stuck in this life longer than he planned. He wasn't someone who believed in frivolous things such as fate or destiny, but he could appreciate when things didn't go to plan, because he was never wrong.

If he was stuck here anyway, he supposed it wasn't so horrible to be stuck with someone like Chuuya. Even if he had to be Dazai.

Maybe one day, he could find a way to be okay with that.

Maybe even be happy, too.

And secretly, he was desperate to hold onto the idea that someone did need him, even when he was at his worst.

Without thinking too hard about it, he lightly placed his hand over one of Chuuya's on the bed, and whispered,

"Okay then, chibi. Convince me."

-----*Present Day*

After another debacle with Chuuya's motorcycle- *Chuuya!! If you keep going over bumps like this I'm going to lose my ability to father your children!!*- the duo made their way back to the shorter's apartment, for no reason in particular.

Dazai started massaging his backside dramatically as Chuuya unlocked the door.

"Ugh, I feel like I lost my virginity to your bike. At least a car would've taken me to dinner first."

"You? Losing your virginity? I think my bike is three years and twenty people too late for that."

"I told you that in confidence, chibi. And now you slander me this way."

"You literally just said you told me in confidence. So therefore it's true."

"And?"

"So it's not slander?!"

"Stop being logical. I'm blocking your number."

"Fucking finally. So what do you want for dinner?"

"Hmm, is Chuuya on the menu?"

"You can gladly eat my fist."

"So stingy!"

Dazai lounged on Chuuya's needlessly expensive leather couch as Chuuya rummaged around in the kitchen for something to cook. Chuuya had always been the more responsible one of the two of them, and despite having burned thousands of meals in the past,

Chuuya had adapted to cooking back in college better than Dazai had.

As he listened to Chuuya grumble to himself about ingredients, Dazai lazily looked around the apartment that was quickly becoming his main place of residence as well.

Chuuya was notorious for having-*ahem*-eclectic taste, but for some reason he was always able to pull off anything that would seem ridiculous for anyone else. One could see that from the cottage-core like flower illustrations in frames on his walls, to the zebra print fluffy carpet under his glass coffee table, all the way to the electric guitars hanging over his small fireplace. Their apartments were both cheap, for neither were established in their workplaces enough to warrant an actual expensive place. Somehow though, Chuuya had a gift for looking richer than he was.

Dazai was working as a consultant at a local detective agency, while Chuuya was an editor at a small publishing company two buildings down. Chuuya had always dreamed of being a writer, so working there was a stepping stone to that, while Dazai always dreamed of making other people feel stupid and beneath him.

So things had worked out pretty well.

“So, what did Kunikida say about the *hoshi-no-tama* case?”

Chuuya seemed to have found something to make, based off of the sound of the stove turning on, and Dazai turned his head in the direction of the kitchen even though he couldn't actually see Chuuya.

The case had been one Kunikida had consulted him about last week of a string of murders in the upper east side of the city. The M.O. of the murderer had been a bracelet left on the victims' wrists of a string of nine clear pearls, hence the name *hoshi-no-tama*, in reference to the clear, pearled lifeforce of a nine-tailed kitsune.

Dazai turned back to stare at the ceiling as he replied,

“Apparently the guy was covering up for his girlfriend, like I

predicted, and so the both of them are being tried for the murder, him as an accessory and her as the accused. Kunikida-kun said the dude was shaking in his boots the whole interrogation and I guess he let it slip a couple hours in. From what Ranpo-san said they had been trying to move forward in that case for months, so he had been talking with the president about hiring me as an actual detective, and Kunikida-kun backed him up.”

Chuuya gasped a little as he exclaimed, “That’s great! That’s what you’ve been wanting, right? Why didn’t you say anything sooner? We should celebrate! Damn it, I drank my last bottle of wine last night. Fuck!”

Dazai couldn’t stop the nervous grimace on his face despite the hilarity of Chuuya’s alcoholism as he placed his tightly clasped hands on his stomach.

“I don’t know if I’ll take the offer.”

That promptly shut Chuuya up, who he could tell immediately stopped what he was doing at the insecure tone in the other’s usually confident voice.

Dazai heard the sound of socked feet on hardwood before Chuuya’s confused but concerned face popped up over the side of the couch he was laying on.

“And why the hell not?”

Dazai looked back toward the ceiling.

“Don’t tell me you think it would suit me. Helping people? That’s not why I’m working there. I just wanted to make everyone else feel inferior when I solved the cases they couldn’t. I’m not meant to actually help anyone else, I don’t think I’m made for it.”

Dazai couldn’t help the sad tone to his answer, because despite feeling like he wasn’t made to help people, it didn’t mean that he

necessarily didn't want to try.

He felt a hand run through his hair gently, and looked back up to where Chuuya was looking down at him with a patient smile.

"I don't know what put that silly thought in your mind, but you're too hard on yourself, as always. Of course you're meant to help people. Despite your assholery, at the end of the day there's no one else I would trust more to help me than you. And I'm sure the same goes for more people in your life than you think."

Dazai didn't even hear the last part.

There's no one else I would trust more to help me than you.

"But what if I'm not good at it?", Dazai said, more vulnerable and quiet than he meant to.

Chuuya just chuckled lightly as he stopped his petting and just left his hand on Dazai's cheek.

"Trust me when I say that you already are. You didn't let me turn into a popsicle that night, did you?" Chuuya said it lightheartedly, but Dazai's own heart clenched at that.

Sometimes he took for granted the fact that Chuuya was still here.

"Take the job, Osamu. If it doesn't work out, I give you full permission to kick my ass. And we both know that would never happen unless I let you." And with an achingly gentle kiss to Dazai's hair, Chuuya walked back to the kitchen, ending the discussion there.

Chuuya had always had a confidence in Dazai that Dazai had never

found in himself.

Dazai had always had a confidence in Chuuya that Chuuya had never found in himself.

Together, they were their own best selves. Dazai was Dazai when he was with Chuuya, and he liked to think that Chuuya was Chuuya when he was with Dazai.

And it was that fact, along with the smell of cooking crab- *his favorite* -in the air that made everything in the room suddenly stop. Dazai's eyes were impossibly wide as he clutched at his heart over his sweater, suddenly painfully aware of everything that had been right in front of his face this entire time.

Dazai hadn't gone on a date in over a year, and hadn't even thought about going on one, even when he proposed double suicides to random women. He almost relied on the resounding '*fuck no*' he would always receive. Should they have actually agreed, there was no doubt in his mind he would have backtracked himself out of the situation.

He also hadn't even thought about decorating his own apartment when he moved in, because he had been already aware that he would be barely spending any time in it, preferring to be in Chuuya's. He had even purchased furniture and trinkets for Chuuya's place, not his own.

When he had started his revenge plan, after just a few times jokingly messing with Chuuya, he actually found himself unable to stop, even without an audience. If anything, he had stopped joking almost immediately with his touches and actions. He had looked forward to them. Once he had allowed himself to be that way with Chuuya, he couldn't stop.

And when he really thought about it, at the end of the day, everything came back to Chuuya.

He was the person he told first when something happened, good or

bad.

He was the person he thought about the most, often throughout the day over little things like a bakery he would pass by that had a pastry he thought Chuuya would like.

He was the person he worried about the most, wondering if he had been carrying any pain by himself that Dazai would be more than happy to carry along with him.

When he really thought about it, Chuuya was the person that Dazai wanted to wake up to, and to be the last person he saw before he went to sleep. And even then, he wanted to have him in his dreams as well, because he was that needy of the other's presence.

And in that moment, Dazai Osamu realized that he was hopelessly and irrevocably in love with Nakahara Chuuya, his best friend of ten years, and he probably had been for way longer than he realized.

And that absolutely *terrified* him.

Notes for the Chapter:

:) He finally figured it out!!

We have now reached a critical part of the story, so stay tuned for the update!!

This chapter is very important to me personally, so I really hope you enjoyed and know that you are always loved. No matter what.

As always, thank you for reading and feedback is

always appreciated! :)

5. I'm sorry that I'm selfish and I don't know what I would do without you

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi again!! I just wanted to say first off, thank you so much for all the love and support this fic has been getting. When I saw that it had hit over 100 kudos I got very emotional, so truly, thank you! It means the absolute world to me!

Now, onto some important notes!

IMPORTANT TW: referenced emotional and verbal child abuse, implied/referenced self sabotage and self damaging actions, implied/referenced self harm, and references to suicide

Please keep these in mind before reading and, like last chapter, if it's too difficult for you to read, I completely understand and to skip the portion with these warnings, it begins with the break indicated with 'Two Years Ago' and ends at the break with 'Present Day'.

As always, thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy! :)

“I’m in love with Chuuya.”

Ango promptly spit out his drink, choked, fell out his chair from his hacking, and proceeded to dazedly stare at the ceiling from the ground.

Oda just sighed.

“What’s the catch this time? Plotting more revenge?”, Oda patiently asked as he helped Ango back into his seat and started to fan his face.

“No catch. I knew I loved him, but it seems to be romantic rather than platonic like I had originally thought...”, Dazai said, eyes not fully present.

Oda and Ango stopped what they were doing and shared a worried look, for Dazai wasn't cracking a joke about it. He said it like he was talking about the weather. He looked...

Empty.

“Well, what are you going to do about it then?” Ango asked, nervously checking his phone.

“Nothing.”

That worry grew tenfold as the duo watched their usually lively friend just sip at his drink, not even looking at them.

He seemed miles away.

“Nothing? Why wouldn't you want to go for it?”, Oda asked as he settled back into his own seat.

“Because it will change things. Chuuya is the most important person in my life. I can't let anything change that. If we were to be more, there is the risk that it could ruin everything we have. I can't....” Dazai suddenly looked down, face unreadable.

“...I can't lose him. I just can't. I'm not me without him.”

Oda gently put a hand to his shoulder, causing him to look up at the

other, who noted how scared Dazai looked. Oda had never seen him look so scared before. If anything, Dazai was usually the one who was scaring someone else.

“You know that you both would do everything in your power to make sure that didn’t happen. Besides, what’s life without a little risk?”

At that question, Ango started making choked noises and a slashing motion with his hand across his neck behind Dazai’s head, causing Oda to confusedly follow his line of sight, eyes widening in panic when he saw what Ango was referring to.

“U-Uh maybe we should talk about this more privately-”

“A romantic relationship with Chuuya isn’t worth the risk.”

Ango and Oda both cut off into silence in their panic. Dazai then chose the worst possible moment to fall back into his joking side, as he threw his head back and laughed in the most fake manner they had ever heard from him. He good naturedly brought both of them into his chest and declared with a huge smile on his face,

“Besides! Who would want to date a stupid chibi anyway! He’s never even dated anyone, I bet he’s terrible at it! Pretending to be all cutesy and coupley with him was starting to make me sick, it’s a good thing I won’t have to pretend anymore! Of course, it’s not like he’s all that lovable!”

“Dazai-”

“Dazai-kun-”

“So it was all pretend, huh?”

Both Oda and Ango stiffened at the addition of a new voice, and all of the sudden their weird behavior had made sense.

Dazai let go of the other two and slowly turned around, ready for the beating of a lifetime. He had done exactly what he told himself he wasn't going to do anymore, especially to Chuuya. He wasn't going to deflect vulnerability by saying things aiming to hurt, especially toward someone like Chuuya, who had only known words intended to hurt. But here he was, insulting the one person who didn't deserve it, all because he was scared.

And there was Chuuya, who didn't have his fists at the ready, nor did he have an angry scowl or foot ready to kick.

No, there was Chuuya, who despite never allowing himself to cry in front of anyone, not even Dazai, at any point in his life, had a single tear trail down to trace the wry, heartbroken smile on his face.

Dazai's heart shattered at the sight. After everything, all the abuse, all the mistreatment by others, in the end, *Dazai* had been the one to make Chuuya cry.

“*Chuuya-*”

Chuuya awkwardly wiped at his eye, blankly staring at the wet spot on his glove before ignoring Dazai completely and turning to Ango.

“It was very kind of you to invite me tonight, but I think I'll be on my

way.”

As Chuuya turned to walk out, Dazai scrambled to his feet and grabbed the other’s wrist.

“Chuuya wait, please! I can explain.” He knew he sounded desperate, but this was his nightmare coming to life. Chuuya was walking away from him and he didn’t know where they stood. He *was* desperate.

Chuuya didn’t angrily wrench his hand away like he was expected to do. This wasn’t a movie where he would make a dramatic exit with tears in his eyes and when Dazai would chase after him, they would confess their love and everything would be alright.

No, this wasn’t a movie.

Instead, Chuuya turned to look at him with such sorrow in his eyes that Dazai knew in that moment, he had truly fucked everything up and he didn’t think he could fix it this time. He felt himself start shaking.

“Chuuya, *please*.”

And Chuuya, perfect, wonderful, too good for him Chuuya, had the audacity to smile reassuringly at him as he gently pried Dazai’s hand off of his wrist.

“Later, Dazai. I need-” Chuuya looked away and swallowed.

“I need some time alone, I think. I don’t hate you, so please don’t hate yourself over this. We’ll be fine.” And with one last broken look toward him, and a polite nod toward the other two, he tugged his hat down to cover his eyes as he walked out of the bar and into the night.

Dazai didn’t know what to do. He always knew what to do. He had five different backup plans to every possible outcome to anything in his life and yet,

He didn’t know what to do.

His entire world was crumbling around him and all he could do was watch. He wanted to believe that Chuuya was right, that they would be fine, but he couldn't ignore the ache of finality in that sorrowful look. He knew Chuuya was going to go into his apartment and think about all the ways he could've messed up, and wonder what was so wrong with him that this had happened.

It's not like he's all that lovable!

Dazai wanted to punch himself. Chuuya was going to spiral again, and he only had himself to blame for it. He had to get to Chuuya before that happened.

As he started making for the door, a hand found its way onto his shoulder, stopping him. He turned to find Oda looking at him sadly and shaking his head. Dazai choked on a sob as he asked,

"Odasaku, what do I do?" Oda placed his other hand on Dazai's shoulder and leaned in comfortingly as he responded,

"Do what he said, Dazai. Give him some time alone. Take that time to reconsider what you deem worth it when it comes to the two of you, and when you figure out what that is, you go and tell him. Without the lies this time."

Dazai could only nod, feeling more numb than he had in years.

----- *Two Years Ago*

[slug :D] *Hey, can I come over?*

Dazai glanced at the time on his nightstand,

3:34 a.m.

He raised an eyebrow at the text, but he supposed it couldn't be too

odd that the chibi was awake at this time if he was.

They were back home for their winter break junior year of college, so it wasn't really weird that both of them were still on a bad sleeping schedule considering what they were used to.

He didn't think much about it when he sent his response.

[me] *A late night rendezvous? How scandalous!!*

The response was immediate.

[slug :D] *please, osamu?*

Dazai felt his face heat at the use of his given name, but his concern was stronger. Chuuya never acted like this. Something had happened.

[me] *of course chibi. my window is always open for you.*

He didn't think further on how that text might have sounded, and just started to worriedly watch his window for any sign of familiar orange hair.

Chuuya needed him. He was trying to be a better person, which made this situation all the more nerve wracking. How do you comfort someone? What was Chuuya expecting? What had happened? Would he want to talk? Would he not? What if he-

He didn't have much time to wallow in his thoughts, however, for it hadn't even been a minute before he saw Chuuya start climbing through the threshold of his bedroom, arms trembling and snow starting to melt on his hair and shoulders. He looked underdressed for the snowy weather, with just a loose sweater and sweatpants. Did he-did he not even have shoes on?

How long had he been out there?

“Chuuya! What is this hideous outfit in such weather!” Dazai said in a light tone, trying to ignore the tightness in his chest at the sight of a shivering Chuuya, who looked dead on his, thankfully at least socked, feet.

Chuuya wrapped his arms tight around himself.

When he still didn’t get an answer, Dazai hurried into his closet and grabbed one of his sweatshirts and a pair of pants from a couple years ago that he thankfully hadn’t gotten rid of yet. There was no way he was going to let Chuuya remain in soaked clothes when he was already freezing, so he didn’t allow himself or Chuuya the time to overthink as he coaxed the still silent Chuuya into letting him help take off his snow covered shirt and pants. Chuuya was violently shivering as he tightened his hold around himself without the clothes, so Dazai quickly pulled the sweatshirt over the other’s head and helped him with the pants as well, throwing the other’s wet clothes into his laundry basket.

Dazai didn’t allow himself the time to appreciate the fact that tough-guy Chuuya was practically swimming in his sweatshirt, nor did he think about the way Chuuya’s hands were completely covered by the sleeves. Dazai didn’t need his head to spin right now, okay. He needed to focus!

Dazai then went and grabbed his softest blanket and proceeded to wrap an unresponsive Chuuya in it until he looked like a little chibi burrito, barely conscious and still shivering. Chuuya stood there in silence with his hair covering most of his face while Dazai got a towel and started to dry the other’s snow-soaked hair. He then began rubbing Chuuya’s shoulders both in a soothing manner and to help warm him up. He grabbed another blanket and wrapped that one around him too.

After nearly five minutes of nothing from Chuuya, Dazai gently asked, “So, are you going to tell me what happened? Or do you want to just sleep?” It wouldn’t have been the first time they shared a bed, and Dazai was more than willing to give half of his up if it meant Chuuya wouldn’t have such an empty look on his face.

Besides, in the safety of his own mind, he could admit he slept a little better knowing his chibi was within reach.

Chuuya was silent, and Dazai, for once, decided to be patient. Chuuya never asked for help, and part of him was honored that he was allowed to see him like this, despite his nerves. So he waited, continuing to gently rub the other's shoulders and arms. Chuuya still felt so, so cold, even through the sweatshirt and two blankets.

Dazai then felt more than heard Chuuya sigh, before he was greeted with the sight of pretty blue eyes that had been hiding behind long bangs.

“C-Can I a-ask you something?”

Dazai looked down at him, worried but curious. It was easy to reply, “Anything.”

Chuuya took a deep breath as he shuffled in the blankets a little, shivering so badly his teeth chattered as he tried to speak.

“Have-”, he hesitated, “Have I e-ever made you feel m-miserable? Be honest. P-please.”, was the question asked, quietly into the night.

Huh?

Dazai looked down at Chuuya, incredulous, until he saw how serious Chuuya looked. His blue eyes were shiny with unshed tears, and he was clutching at the blanket like it was a lifeline, still shivering violently.

Dazai softened immediately and pushed the sleeves covering

Chuuya's hands up to his wrist, taking them into his own. Chuuya's hands felt like ice, so Dazai brought them to his mouth as he spoke to bring some heat to them.

"Of course not, why would you even ask something like that?"

Chuuya let out a shaky breath, staring at where Dazai continued to blow hot air onto his hands, instead of meeting Dazai's eyes. When he didn't respond, Dazai was suddenly struck with clarity.

"She said something she shouldn't have, I take it?"

When Chuuya didn't respond again, Dazai pulled the full chibi burrito into his arms, resting his head on top of the other's. As much as he made fun of Chuuya for his height, it really felt like he was made for hugs like these.

Against his chest, Chuuya murmured, "I-I know I'm an adult now and I should know better than to react anymore. I've been really trying but I don't know why it still hurts so badly..." His grip tightened on Dazai's pajama shirt.

Chuuya was someone that seemed to always have it together. Someone others went to when in a crisis, because they knew that even if he yelled, freaked out, or promised bodily harm, it would be solved in the end. Dazai knew this, because he was one of the people that had been relying on him since the beginning.

However, it was moments like these where Dazai was painfully reminded that Chuuya wasn't as confident as he made everyone think. Moments where Chuuya was unsure if he was even capable of being loved, because the one person who was supposed to love him above all others no matter what, his mother, barely tolerated him. Even when he was at his best.

"...Remember how you were telling me it might help to go to a professional?" Dazai gently nodded.

"Well, I stupidly brought it up tonight and it turned into this big thing. How I have a gift for making everyone around me miserable and that she should be the one getting help for having to deal with

me. That bad people don't deserve sympathy." Chuuya sniffed.

"I wanted to say that I wasn't looking for sympathy, that I just wanted to be okay with being me, just for a second. That maybe if I'm better I can do a better job as a son." He took in a shaky breath.

"But then she started asking if I had been lying about having friends and people liking me at school if I was apparently struggling so much, and I was too caught off guard to come up with a good answer. She now thinks all my "friends" just tolerate me and I'm trying to get attention. I tried to come up with something to say...but I just..."

Unlike Dazai, Chuuya had always cared about what other people thought. Not necessarily of him as a whole, but what he made them feel. And since his own mother clearly didn't like him, he took it as a personal fault on who he was as a person.

Dazai couldn't imagine how devastating it must have been for Chuuya to hear her say that after how hard Dazai knew he had been trying to make her and everyone around him happy. Even at the expense of his own happiness. He had even changed who he was to fit her mold, but it still hadn't been enough. They were twenty years old, and Chuuya was still trapped being someone he clearly didn't like being, all for the sake of someone else's happiness.

"What if she's right, and everyone leaves me behind? I would have no one to blame but myself." Chuuya whispered.

Chuuya did everything in his power to be a good child, but despite his politeness, he was rambunctious and loud without trying, for it was who he was. His older sister, Kouyou, had always been gentle and ladylike, which, despite their close bond, just made Chuuya look even worse. While his mother had taken care of them and shown Chuuya that she did love him, there was always a sense of obligation in that love. If he behaved, he was loved. If he didn't, it was put into question.

Dazai didn't know what it was like to be loved with conditions, but Chuuya did. And after Kouyou moved out, without a mediator, he was left to fend for himself.

Chuuya allowed himself to be walked all over and he never thought to put his happiness above anyone else's, because from the day he entered this world, he was told he was worth less than those around him without an explanation for why.

Dazai could always tell when things got bad again, because Chuuya would stop taking care of himself, assuming he didn't deserve simple things like food and sleep.

Looking at Chuuya now, that devastation was more muted, with tired sadness tinting his eyes. Knowing the situation better now, Dazai could picture what Chuuya had been doing before he had texted him, and it made his chest ache.

Chuuya had sat in the snow, purposefully underdressed, thinking he didn't deserve to feel warm. It was why he had been silent, realizing he had asked for help when he thought he should have kept suffering.

Self-loathing was a face Dazai wore well, but on Chuuya, it just looked wrong.

When it came down to it, the only person Chuuya had ever succeeded in making miserable was himself.

"I know I'm being dramatic, it's all so stupid. I just—" Chuuya stepped out of the embrace, wrapping his arms around his waist under the blanket and looking to the floor.

“I just wish I was somebody worth sticking around for. Someone worth loving. I’ve been trying so hard, but nothing seems to work. I don’t know where I keep messing up.”

Chuuya looked heartbroken. He genuinely thought that he had done something wrong along the way to make it so that he would never be loved in the way that he had always wanted.

In the way that he had always needed. Sure, Chuuya made mistakes and said and did things that he regrets, but that doesn’t mean he should ever be prevented from finding happiness.

Especially when he was trying so hard to be good, which was something he had been from the very start.

“Chuuya, you not being someone worth loving, it’s just not true.”

Dazai wasn’t thinking when that came out, he just couldn’t listen to Chuuya talk about himself like this anymore. He would do anything to make him stop.

Even if it meant that he himself had to be vulnerable too.

He felt his face burn as he dared to say the words that neither of them had ever said out loud, but showed in their every action. He knew it was mutual, that he was cared for, but tonight was about Chuuya.

And Chuuya needed to know that Dazai had lied all those years ago, and that he needed Chuuya just as much as Chuuya needed him.

“That’s not true, Chuuya, b-because I love you.”

Chuuya's eyes widened as his breath hitched. Dazai was absolutely mortified by how embarrassed he felt and he was sure he looked, but he stood his ground as Chuuya searched his face for something. Seeming to have found it, for the first time the whole night, Chuuya relaxed.

Dazai had been terrified to say that, but the small smile of genuine relief on Chuuya's face was more than worth it. With the way Chuuya was looking at him with starry eyes, one would think Dazai held the world in his hands.

Well, in Dazai's mind, with Chuuya in his arms, he truly did.

"I love you too, Osamu.", Chuuya said, breathlessly.

Dazai's heart swelled. Sure it was just three little words, but as someone who had never been able to say them, even to his own family, this felt like a weight off his shoulders. Chuuya deserved to know the truth, and he grabbed at Chuuya again to bring him in for another hug. It was natural. This didn't feel like a big deal.

"I know it's stupid to think like this, and I know you tell me all the time not to listen to her, but-" Chuuya hesitated and huffed, burrowing into Dazai's chest even more.

"-for what it's worth, you have no idea how much you saying that means to me." Chuuya's grip on him was borderline painful as he choked, but Dazai didn't dare say anything.

"I guess there's this selfish part of me that wants someone to prove me wrong when I say horrible things about myself. That it isn't selfish of me to want to like myself, even if just for a little while."

"That's not selfish. If anything, you deserve to feel that way more than I do." Dazai said quickly, unwilling to let Chuuya's mind wander into that kind of territory.

Chuuya loosened his grip on the other as he looked up into Dazai's eyes, so hopeful and content that Dazai felt his face smile in response before he could process it.

“We both do. It’s not a competition. I guess we’ll just have to find a way to be happy together, yeah? I can’t imagine a world where I could be happy if you aren’t.”

Chuuya had always seen something meaningful in Dazai, even when Dazai could barely look at himself in the mirror.

“Yeah. I think I can live with that.” Dazai hummed lightly as he pulled Chuuya back in, breathing into his hair as he closed his eyes before any incriminating tears could fall out.

They stood there in each other’s embrace for a few more precious moments before Chuuya started to wiggle a little and asked,

“As much as I enjoy freezing to death, is it okay if I stay here for the night? I can’t really feel my legs, so I don’t know if I can walk all the way home.”

Dazai immediately gasped, “Chuuya! Why didn’t you say so! You can’t lose your legs! You’ll be even shorter!”

When Chuuya growled, Dazai knew in that moment that everything was going to be okay.

For now, at least.

Ignoring the growls, Dazai leaned down and scooped Chuuya up bridal style, blankets and all. Chuuya immediately started squawking and thrashing in his grip. A wayward hand slapped him on the cheek and pushed against his face.

“W-What the fuck?! Put me down! I can still walk to the bed you bastard!”

“No can do chibi-chan! I must do my due diligence to protect what little height you have! Really, you should be thanking me.”, Dazai teased as he carried the other to his bed, gently resting him against the pillows on the left side. Chuuya’s face was bright red as Dazai did

so, grumbling to himself the whole time.

Cute.

Eh? Chuuya??? Cute???

Alright, Dazai wasn't going to continue that train of thought tonight. Thank goodness Chuuya couldn't read his thoughts or he would've been pummeled to the ground.

When he started to walk toward his side of the bed, a hand wrapped around his wrist, causing him to turn around and take in the sight of an embarrassed chibi still wrapped up in blankets, looking more vulnerable than Dazai had ever seen him.

“...Thank you.”

Dazai smiled easily as he replied, “No need to thank me. You're my best friend. It's in my job description.”

Chuuya turned even more red at this. Ah, Chuuya usually got angry, but he always got so flustered from the tiniest of kind words. Not that Dazai was one to talk.

Once Dazai was comfortably on his own side, facing Chuuya, the redhead reached out and grabbed at his wrist again, fiddling with it. Dazai was confused, but didn't see anything wrong with it, so he just watched Chuuya play with it while staring curiously.

It wasn't until Chuuya looked back up at him in soft confusion that he understood the other's fascination with his wrist.

“You aren't wearing your bandages.”

Dazai shuffled a little closer.

“No, I’m not.”

Dazai’s bandages had always acted as a second skin to him. Though the scars they were hiding had faded over the years, the comfort that he felt from wearing them protected him from the fear he felt at the thought of having to explain himself to strangers.

But this was Chuuya. He had never felt the need to hide anything from him. Because at the end of the day, it was Chuuya who made him feel safe, even without his protective armor.

He dazedly watched Chuuya trace the lines on his wrists and forearms, hands painfully gentle in their actions. It was one of the rare times he wasn’t wearing his gloves, so the touch was all the more soft. Chuuya could punch the life out of someone thrice his size, yet the way he touched Dazai was as light as a feather, like he would break if he wasn’t so gentle. But such was the duality of Chuuya.

Rough around the edges, but horribly soft on the inside.

All of Dazai’s musings came to an abrupt halt when he felt soft lips press against the long line on his wrist, right at his pulse point. It was his ugliest scar, as it had been dealt with the intention of finality. He felt his eyes gloss over when Chuuya reached for his other arm to do the same to the other wrist. Dazai choked when Chuuya smiled a little against his skin, eyes shining a little as well. Chuuya’s lips had barely broken from his skin before Dazai was throwing his arms around Chuuya’s head and pulling him into his chest, tangling their legs together under the sheets. It was to warm up Chuuya’s numb legs, of course.

God , Chuuya had almost froze out there. Dazai closed his eyes tightly.

“Please don’t worry me like this again.”, He begged. Chuuya’s grip tightened.

“Please don’t let me find you as a popsicle out in the snow when I could’ve been there. Please, Chuuya. All I ask is that you try to tell me when you need help. I know it’s painful for you and I’m so sorry to ask this of you, but I’m selfish and I don’t know what I would do without you. So please, I don’t care what happens with us, even if you hate my guts and tell me to fuck off forever, if you need me I’ll always be there for you, no matter what.”

He felt Chuuya sniff against his chest and start shivering again. He brought Chuuya closer and wrapped more of the blankets around him again.

A quiet, “Always?”

A confident,

“Always.”

----- *Present Day*

They had never brought it up again. Dazai had thought he had said those words with the intention of them being platonic, but it was

clear that not only had he been lying to himself, but Chuuya had said them back with the intention of them being romantic.

But Chuuya had never brought it up again either. Looking back now, Dazai realized that starting on that day, Chuuya had willingly taken on an entirely new pain when it came to love.

Chuuya had thought Dazai had confessed, allowing himself to be vulnerable enough to confess as well, only for Dazai to then act like nothing had happened. Chuuya was then forced to watch as Dazai continued to go on dates and like other people as if that night had never occurred, while Chuuya couldn't find it in him to look at anyone else, despite how hard he had tried.

And so, Chuuya stopped reading his poems to Dazai.

Notes for the Chapter:

...I'm sorry

I know things look pretty bleak right now, but stay tuned for the update to see what happens!

This chapter was also very important to me, so I hope you enjoyed!!

As always, thank you so much for reading and any feedback is always appreciated!! :)

6. "Take that time to reconsider what you deem worth it when it comes to the two of you"

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! I thought I would get this chapter out as soon as possible with how I left things last chapter (lol)

Thank you as always for all the support, and I hope you enjoy! :)

"Take that time to reconsider what you deem worth it when it comes to the two of you, and when you figure out what that is, you go and tell him. Without the lies this time."

Dazai was pathetic.

He was sitting on the ground by his front door, head leaning against it, having collapsed from the lack of adrenaline from coming home and all of the previous panic becoming just aching melancholy.

He couldn't even find it in himself to feel any self pity or sadness for the fact that he might not even have a best friend anymore. All he could think about was the fact that Chuuya was hurting right now, and he was the one to blame.

He knew that Chuuya was sitting in his apartment, alone for the first time in days, spiraling, and Dazai not only couldn't do anything to help him, but had been the cause. All he could do is wait and hope that Chuuya still wanted something to do with him.

Dazai's hands found their way into his own hair, curling into himself in pure misery.

"Why couldn't I just be honest too?"

Dazai spent the next two days in an empty haze. He didn't dare try to contact Chuuya, not only afraid to hear what the other would say, but also scared of pushing the other's boundaries when he knew he was already vulnerable.

Chuuya was a prideful man, but, if needed him, he would call. This was a fact that Dazai desperately clung to, praying to a god that he didn't believe in that Chuuya would do so once he was ready.

So, he spent the next two days on autopilot, only going to work, eating what little food he ate out, then spending his time wandering throughout the night before begrudgingly returning to his place and sleeping.

He couldn't find it in himself to wallow in his apartment when just the fact that he was there instead of at Chuuya's was already too much to bear. He also couldn't find it in himself to see Oda and Ango, knowing the pitying looks he would receive should he hang out with them.

He didn't deserve any pity when he had brought this upon himself. While his mind was screaming at him to go back to his self-damaging ways, he couldn't find it in him to act upon any of his urges. He did everything in his power to distract himself, for he wanted to be completely present and ready should Chuuya decide he needed him.

Being needed was tiring. How did Chuuya always do it?

Dazai blankly poked at the toast on his work desk from the breakroom, mind immediately jumping to a faint memory of a college dorm, singed orange hair, burnt toast, and a lot of cussing.

"Dazai! We didn't hire you to slack off! Get to that paperwork before you send us back even further off schedule!"

Dazai glanced up at Kunikida from where his eyes had been blankly glued to the toast in front of him, only to plaster on a fake smile.

"But Kunikida-kuuuuuuuuuun~ paperwork is so boring! Why should I do it when I can just make you do it?", He whined petulantly.

Kunikida ignored his whining to head into the president's office, grumbling to himself the whole way, most likely to avoid blowing up at him for the fourth time today.

While his outbursts were usually the highlight of Dazai's day, today they just reminded him of another person in his life that was easily angered. One that he hadn't heard from in days.

Dazai stared lazily at the forms on his desk until he heard a soft,

"Um, Dazai-san?"

Dazai looked up into the uniquely purple-yellow eyes of his favorite intern, the small smile on his face becoming actually genuine as he watched the younger man try to balance the coffees in his arms while looking at Dazai nervously.

"What is it Atsushi-kun?"

Atsushi seemed to hesitate for a second before gently asking,

"Are you alright?"

Dazai felt the smile slip off his face into a grimace as he tried not to look at the other coldly. He didn't like the idea of someone noticing he was off, but Atsushi was too sweet of a guy for him to actually be mean.

"I'm not quite sure I know what you mean Atsushi-kun. I can assure you I'm completely fine. Why do you ask?"

Atsushi seemed to have gained some confidence since working under Dazai, because he didn't backtrack like he normally would have. Rather, he placed a coffee on Kunikida's desk and looked at Dazai determinedly.

"It's just that, well, you didn't seem that pleased when Kunikida-san got annoyed with you. And you've been staring at that paper for a

while now, when you usually just put it on Kunikida-san's desk. I just-I was worried about you. That's all."

Like he had said, Atsushi-kun was a sweet guy.

Dazai smiled slightly as he replied, "I promise you that I am quite fine. I appreciate the concern, but it is unneeded."

Atsushi didn't seem content with that, but didn't press further.

Dazai had hoped the other would drop it, but such was not the case.

Throughout the work day, Dazai caught Atsushi occasionally throwing a concerned look his way, and the younger seemed to be refilling his coffee far more than what was necessary. Dazai couldn't even keep up with the amount he had on his desk.

After the fifth time that Atsushi had placed a drink onto Dazai's desk, he sighed and decided to just take advantage of a genuinely nice person attempting to help him, because the last time he had, he got a best friend out of it.

Besides, this wasn't the first time that Dazai had thought about the similarities between Chuuya and his intern, so maybe the other could provide some insight that he otherwise wouldn't have thought of.

"Atsushi-kun."

The other looked up at the sound of his name.

"Yes, Dazai-san?"

Dazai hummed as he pretended to write something down on his paperwork.

"Can I ask you a question?"

Recognizing that Dazai was opening up the chance at conversation with him, Atsushi brightened at this, and quickly grabbed a chair to sit closely next to Dazai without the risk of prying ears.

"Of course!" Atsushi's energy was infectious, as Dazai felt himself

relax a little at how excited the other was just to talk to him. He really was his favorite intern.

Dazai starting nervously playing with the pen in his hand, twirling it a bit as he turned to Atsushi, painting a look of indifference on his face as he asked,

“Hypothetically, let’s say that you and someone you’re close to got into an argument over something you did. They said to leave them alone and that they needed time, but you know that they are...hurting so you can’t help but worry. Would it be wrong to reach out?”

Atsushi seemed to think about this for a second, putting his finger to his chin and staring at the ceiling. He hummed a bit before replying, “Well I feel like it mostly depends on the person. Like, for me, with my little sister Kyouka, I know to reach out even when she tells me she’s fine and needs to be alone because even if she really needs the help, she won’t ever ask for it. But my other f-friend Ryuu is someone who would probably stab me if I ever talked to him when he was upset, so I wait until he reaches out first. It’s about what the other person is comfortable with.”

Dazai considered this as he turned back to his desk, whispering, “But what if I’m not sure what the right thing to do is? Hypothetically speaking, of course.”

Atsushi leaned closer as he said more seriously, “If you were in the wrong in the argument, I can’t help but think it would be a good idea to let the other person reach out first, because despite how hard it might be knowing that they are hurting, it will mean more to them that you didn’t try to convince them to forgive you when they were already in a position of vulnerability. You don’t want to invalidate their feelings. Let them forgive you on their own terms.”

Atsushi paused as his gaze fell to the ground and his eyes hardened.

“I struggled a lot with the idea of someone being upset with me, but when you are the one who hurt them, it’s up to them to decide when

communication will start again. As painful as it might be, sometimes patience and time is the greatest gift you can give someone.”

Dazai nodded his head, not happy with that answer but also understanding that Atsushi was probably right.

When he really thought about it, when Chuuya had been knocking on death’s door, he did reach out to Dazai in the end, despite his clear disgust with himself over doing so. He had a feeling Chuuya was a bit more like Atsushi’s boyfrie--oops slip of the tongue there-friend Ryuu, and would prefer that he reach out instead of Dazai pushing him.

Chuuya wasn't one to swallow his pride often, and Dazai didn't want to make him feel any worse than he probably already did. It wasn't weak to cry or be in pain, but Dazai had a feeling Chuuya saw it that way when it came to himself. Dazai had even teased Chuuya's more gentle side when they were younger. He regretted it now more than anything, but now he had a chance to make things right, if Chuuya wanted anything to do with him still.

So, Dazai would just have to learn to be okay with waiting.

While Dazai was lost in his thoughts, Atsushi started fiddling with his hands nervously before asking,

“Dazai-san...is this about Chuuya-san?”

Dazai immediately turned back to Atsushi, face unreadable and startling the other in the process. Atsushi quickly started working on damage control, sensing the uneasy aura coming off of the other.

“Ah! S-Sorry! I just thought, well, you always t-talk about Chuuya-san and you hadn’t mentioned him the past few days, and for you to ask me that I couldn’t help but wonder...”

Dazai sighed as he patted the silver haired head of his intern to stop his rambling. Atsushi didn’t mean any harm, and Dazai was more nervous about that fact that he had been so transparent.

“Ah, you are truly becoming a star detective in training Atsushi-kun!

Alas, the chibi and I have become at odds, and I don't want him to get any shorter from the stress!" Dazai said airily, not feeling as carefree as he sounded.

Atsushi gave him a deadpan look before sighing.

"...It's okay to be worried about those you care about, you know. If anything, it's kind of nice to see you sounding so...human. I think you forget that it's okay to be one sometimes."

Dazai looked at the younger, wide eyed. He didn't know what to say to that. Atsushi seemed to notice his internal debate, continuing with,

"You said that Chuuya-san needed time right? Well I think when he reaches out, which he will, you should show that side of you to him. If what you have told me about him is true, I think it would mean more to him than you know to not be the only one that's honest."

Dazai leaned back in his chair, shocked at the wise words from his intern.

"Atsushi, when did you become so good at reading people?"

Atsushi immediately started blushing and just said, "I-I wouldn't go that far, I just know what it's like to be unsure of yourself. And I can tell you care about Chuuya-san a whole lot."

Dazai smiled at Atsushi, and this time it was genuine.

"You're going to be a fine detective one day, Atsushi-kun. I hope you realize how bright of a future you have ahead of you."

Despite how brave he had been earlier, Atsushi promptly fell out of his chair in his shocked embarrassment at the obvious praise.

Taking Odasaku, and now Atsushi's, advice to heart, Dazai spent the rest of the day ignoring his work and pondering what he would say should Chuuya reach out.

He had told Oda and Ango that a romantic relationship with Chuuya wasn't worth the risk, but he decided to do what Atsushi said and be more honest.

And in order to be more honest with Chuuya, he needed to be more honest with himself first.

He thought about what it would mean should he and Chuuya enter a romantic relationship.

Being a couple meant they were expected to go on dates, which their outings basically already were. It also would mean potentially living together, which Dazai already wanted to do anyway, and they had done so in the past. It would mean sleeping in the same bed, which they had already done on too many occasions to count.

It also meant it would be normal to be touchy, like holding hands, cuddling when in the same bed, Dazai could put his arms around Chuuya without thinking twice about it, it would mean k-kissing-

Dazai felt himself blush like a damn schoolgirl thinking about that and he put his head in his hands to hide his embarrassment. He was twenty-two years old for fuck's sake and he's blushing over the idea of a kiss.

Okay. So it wasn't just a fleeting thought. Dazai was fully, 100% in love with Chuuya, and he could not deny it whatsoever anymore.

Step 1 of being honest with himself done. Progress.

Moving on to the idea of the risks that came with a relationship. When he really thought about it, it was obvious that what they had basically was already a relationship, and, not only that, the idea of getting to be like that with Chuuya, he now realized, was more than worth the risk.

Because when he really thought about it, if he somehow managed to pull this off and actually get Chuuya to agree to date him, this would be it for him.

He stopped walking and clutched at his chest for a moment, breathless.

That was it wasn't it? Chuuya was his endgame, and there was no reason to deny that anymore.

Even if Chuuya told him to fuck off and die, no one would ever compare to the redhead who had stolen his heart so perfectly under his nose that he didn't even notice. And looking back, everything made sense.

For years, Chuuya had looked out for him.

When they were younger and Dazai was teased by other kids about his bandages, Chuuya would beat them up so badly that he got suspended on multiple occasions, only to smirk to himself when others brought up his brutishness. He got the scolding of a lifetime every single time, and when Dazai would ask him about it, Chuuya would just scoff and say, *"No one else is allowed to be mean to you. That's my job."*

When they got a little older and those dark thoughts became too much for Dazai in his large and lonely home, Chuuya would climb through his window unannounced and set up a video game without

asking him questions or forcing him to talk. And when Dazai was at his worst and would terrorize Chuuya with his words and actions, Chuuya would get pissed and yell back, often saying just as hurtful words, escalating all of their fights to more than they needed to be. But Chuuya stuck by him anyway, too loyal and too good to watch Dazai fall deeper into his own mind, even if it meant he had to sacrifice his own pride as well.

And once they had grown up, Chuuya still stuck around, even when Dazai's self-doubt and hatred drowned him. Chuuya helped him while he himself was struggling with his own sense of identity.

And now, Dazai wanted to look out for Chuuya too.

Dazai wanted to be there for him on the nights when he didn't want to look in the mirror, scared of who he would see staring back. He wanted to be there on the days when Chuuya was irritable and ready to pick a fight with Dazai at every little thing, which, to be frank, was most days.

He wanted to be there when Chuuya wasn't sure who he was anymore, and reassure him that he was exactly who he was meant to be. He wanted to help him when Chuuya didn't think he deserved the help, and comfort him in ways he had never been shown before. He wanted to get Chuuya to swallow his pride and be comfortable enough to be vulnerable with him without worrying about it afterwards.

Dazai wanted to spend every day of the rest of his life assuring Chuuya that he wasn't going anywhere, no matter how hard things might get. That he was never going to leave him behind, like he had been so many times before.

Dazai wanted to spend the rest of his life loving Chuuya, proving to him that he was perfectly lovable just the way he was.

Realizing that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with Chuuya in the romantic sense made Dazai want to do something that he thought he never fully would.

Simply by existing, Chuuya had made Dazai want to try existing too.

For the first time in days, Dazai found himself smiling on his way home from work, thinking about the possibilities of the future, which he had never cared to think about until now. If Chuuya still wanted to be with him, Dazai was ready to take on anything.

His mind whirled with possibilities, like how soon Chuuya's book would be ready, how Dazai could support him, what color drapes he could buy that wouldn't look as tacky as the rest of Chuuya's place...

...Dazai also thought about how much he really needed to get better at cooking, knowing that he had forced Chuuya to learn back when they were in college after they had both almost set their apartment on fire too many times. Maybe he should start trying a little harder to be helpful in littler ways too.

Needless to say, he had a lot of catching up to do.

Dazedly walking in the direction of his apartment, he almost didn't notice the vibrations coming from his coat pocket until it was almost too late.

Almost.

Dazai fished his phone out of his pocket, expecting it to be Odasaku calling to see how he was holding up again, before freezing on the spot.

[slug < 3] *Incoming call*

Notes for the Chapter:

!!! Next chapter is THE chapter !!! So stay tuned for that update!

As always, thank you so much for reading and any feedback is always appreciated!

7. Because I'm not me without you

Notes for the Chapter:

This is it!!!

Thank you so much for reading, and I hope you enjoy :)

[slug < 3] *Incoming call*

Despite his shock, Dazai had never hit the accept button on a call faster in his life. With his heart pounding so loud he could barely hear his own voice, he called out into the static,

“Chuuya?”

“Picking up on the first ring? I never took you as the desperate type.”

Dazai immediately grabbed the phone with two hands. Chuuya’s voice was joking, but it sounded slightly stuffy. Dazai smiled, but it felt shaky.

“...Insulting me already? You break my heart.”

“I need to make up for lost time. Can’t let the punk get too cocky without me around. Someone needs to keep you humble.”

Dazai chuckled, feeling lighter than he had in days.

“Says the cockiest hatrack I know.” He couldn’t quite keep the fondness out of his voice.

“You know a lot of hatracks? I knew you didn’t have any friends, but I didn’t think you would resort to talking to furniture without me. Such is the fate of the extra stuff that comes with bandages, I guess.”

Dazai’s heart clenched.

“You’re right. I’m not the best to the friends I do have, now am I?”

A sigh.

“You’re trying, Osamu. Your desperate ass picking up that fast just proves it.”

Dazai swallowed at the sheer emotion in Chuuya’s voice as he breathed out his name. He blinked back tears at the relief he felt falling back into their banter so easily.

That, and just the sheer relief that the other had *called* .

Chuuya never asked for help, never allowed himself to be vulnerable enough to be emotional or cry in front of someone else, even Dazai. Dazai knew what that loneliness felt like.

The loneliness of knowing you had people, but that you couldn’t show them your worst. The loneliness of keeping up an image that you are okay.

Dazai knew this, for he had done the same.

The fact alone that Chuuya allowed himself to put emotion into his voice as he called Dazai’s name was enough for Dazai to know that this was his chance.

Dazai cut to the chase, knowing in his heart why Chuuya had called, but needing to hear it from the other’s mouth anyway. He felt his feet naturally start carrying him away from the direction of his apartment in search of the only other place he could ever call home.

“Chuuya, what do you need?”

He heard a shaky breath from the other side and the shuffling of clothing on leather. He could imagine Chuuya on his big leather couch, spreading his legs out and leaning his head back as he cradled the phone next to his cheek. There were a couple of painfully silent seconds as Dazai continued mindlessly walking toward the other’s apartment, until he heard a soft sigh.

“A new car would be nice, or a chance to punch my boss in the face. Maybe even some more wine. You know, the good kind, not the shitty liquor store kind.” He was quiet for a moment, Dazai’s heart in his throat.

“But since I haven’t gotten my paycheck this month yet...”

Chuuya sighed again, heavier than the last.

“...It’s gotta be you, Osamu. I need you.”

Dazai couldn’t find it in himself to be embarrassed over the choked sob he let out at that.

He was still needed. He had messed up, he had been cruel, but Chuuya still trusted him, after everything. Dazai took in a shuttering breath before replying honestly,

“I’ve always been yours, Chuuya.”

He heard Chuuya choke slightly, clearly trying not to let out any more vulnerable noises. Dazai felt his heart continue to pound as a stray tear fell down his cheek. When had he started crying?

It wasn't until that moment that he realized how painfully lonely he had been without Chuuya. He started walking faster.

"Don't move, chibi. I'm on my way."

"Don't be reckless, shitty Osamu. I'll be pissed if you die in your obvious pathetic hurry to get here."

Dazai couldn't help but laugh a little at that, despite how weak Chuuya sounded as he said it.

"No promises, Chuuya. But for you, I'll try my best."

He didn't wait for a response before hanging up and breaking into an all out sprint. He got weird looks from the other people on the street, confused as to why a clearly emotionally wrecked man was sprinting in a trench coat past them, but he paid them no mind. The wind meant nothing on his face, for the beating of his heart was louder than anything else around him.

Chuuya had said he needed him, and Dazai was damned if he wasn't going to get there as fast as physically possible.

Chuuya was his end game. His everything. He had spent so many nights feeling as though something was missing, enough that it made him question his place in this world. He wandered through this life looking at things through a jaded, broken lens, unable to discern the fact that everything he had needed to feel that happiness that seemed so elusive to him for so long had been right there the whole time.

Chuuya had not only convinced him that life was worth sticking around for, but he had convinced Dazai that there might just be a little room for him to find happiness, too.

Dazai was one dot among the billions. He had never believed in frivolous things such as soulmates, for it seemed too good to be true to be able to find the one other person among the billions that's made just for you.

Dazai had never considered himself a lucky man. But somehow, he had found that person among the billions.

Chuuya was reckless, arrogant, aggressive, and overall everything that someone like Dazai should hate. He was a tacky muscle for brains that clashed with Dazai's smug tactical persona. They fought everyday and had hurt each other more times than they could count in the past.

But Chuuya was also loyal. Painfully loyal to someone who, for a long time, had lost themselves to the darkness. Someone who had purposefully hurt him because they were too scared to accept love and care. Chuuya was loyal, and he was also caring, when by no means did the world around him show him the same care he showed to those who meant something to him.

And Dazai wasn't perfect. He could barely tolerate himself on most days, and could barely tolerate other people even less. He had few friends, never truly opening himself up to anyone in fear of his own lack of humanity showing through. But Chuuya was no different. Chuuya struggled to find himself, always changing and adapting to fit other people's molds and expectations of him. They both struggled to feel like their own person.

And Dazai found that Chuuya had allowed Dazai to feel the most human emotion he could. Dazai found he could love. Despite never telling those around him, despite never admitting to himself until today that it could be true, Dazai did love.

And Dazai loved Chuuya, who was convinced he would never be loved.

So let me convince you, please.

It was time Dazai convinced Chuuya, too.

Holy *shit* did Dazai need to work out more. By the time he got to Chuuya's apartment lobby, he was disgustingly sticky with sweat and could barely breathe. Why the *fuck* do people do this for fun? Endorphins his flat ass.

The worker on duty looked shell shocked as Dazai tiredly walked past him, giving a quick salute and a breathless, "Evening, gentleman." fully aware of the tear stains on his face.

Dazai took the time between the lobby and Chuuya's front door to catch his breath, suddenly painfully aware of the gravity of this upcoming conversation.

It was hard not to think about how the next time he would walk out of this door, it could either be without Chuuya, with Chuuya as his friend still but there being an awkwardness, or Chuuya being in a relationship with him. He silently begged the universe that it was going to be the latter.

Having now caught his breath, he stared at the familiar red of Chuuya's front door, fist hovering over the wood, but hesitating. Was he ready for this? Would he *ever* be ready for this?

He closed his eyes for a second and thought about Chuuya, in there all alone, needing him.

Chuuya always took on pain by himself. And yet, he had only ever asked Dazai for the comfort he knew he could only get from him and him alone.

He didn't waste anymore time before knocking twice on the door. He heard soft cursing and footsteps before the door flew open, revealing a teary-eyed Chuuya, in sweatpants and an oversized sweater, looking far too soft for his own good.

Dazai's heart lurched in his chest, now finally getting to see the sight

that he had been missing the most for far too long. Three days was far too much time to not get to see Chuuya and his fiery blue eyes, which were staring at him in the same longing manner that he knew he mirrored. Three days, such a small amount of time, but felt like forever.

Dazai wanted that face to be the one he looked at the most for the rest of his life. He had been looking at that face for ten years, and yet that time still wasn't even a fraction of what his soul craved.

But, Chuuya was never one for tact. It was one of his many charms.

"You look like shit. Did you run here?", was what Chuuya decided to ask first, taking in Dazai's sweaty appearance, as if he didn't look like a mess himself.

Dazai softened. "Chuuya said he needed me."

Chuuya then did something that Dazai never thought he would ever see.

His eyes immediately filled with tears before he brokenly whispered,

"Fuck."

Dazai couldn't tell who moved first but the next thing he knew he was in Chuuya's apartment, the door having been shut along the way, now with two armfuls of his Chuuya, who was openly sobbing into his chest. Dazai panicked a little, having no idea how to comfort him, but he could tangibly feel the trust he was being shown to be the one to see Chuuya like this, so he just decided to wing it.

His grip tightened around the other, and he buried his face into soft red curls, allowing himself to let go as well, openly crying into the other's hair, soaking some of the strands in the process. He started rambling,

"Chuuya, I'm so sorry."

“I know.”

“Chuuya, I didn’t mean any of it.”

“Osamu-”

“Chuuya you did nothing wrong. You never messed up. It was my fault. You did nothing wrong. I promise I didn’t mean it. *Fuck*, I’m so *sorry*. ”

He felt Chuuya weaken in his hold, and they both slowly fell to the floor, still clinging to each other, but now Chuuya was in his lap and could place his arms around Dazai’s neck and his head on Dazai’s shoulder, and Dazai could lean his head against the other’s and gently place a kiss at the other’s ear, keeping his face turned toward him.

He heard Chuuya take a deep breath, the harder sobs having now subsided as he moved his face into the junction between Dazai’s neck and shoulder, Dazai’s lips now ghosting over the other’s cheek as the Chuuya blubbered,

“I don’t want it to be pretend.”

Dazai felt his stomach drop in guilt at the self-loathing that dripped from Chuuya’s tone as he said that, but he didn’t say anything, allowing Chuuya the chance to let everything out that he had been clearly torturing himself with all this time.

Part of him was also afraid of what he might say at that moment.

Chuuya’s grip tightened at his neck just slightly as an anchor, before he continued softly,

“I was...so *happy*. Part of me knew you were messing with me, I knew that. I know you better than anyone so, of course I caught on you fucking *idiot*. I mean, who else would be that ridiculous but you?” Chuuya laughed humorlessly before sighing.

“But, in those brief moments when you held me or called me some sickly sweet name, I could pretend for a second that it was real. That you actually wanted me,” Chuuya paused, letting out another laugh that sounded more like a soft sob.

“But then you would turn away and hold in your laughs, and I would be reminded yet again that those moments that meant everything to me had meant absolutely nothing to you.”

Dazai’s grip on Chuuya had to be painful at this point, but Chuuya didn’t say anything about it.

“I didn’t want my feelings to get in the way of our friendship. You have and will always mean too much for me to have ever allowed that to happen. So, I kept them to myself.” Chuuya sounded like he was trying so hard to stay strong, and Dazai ached, wishing that Chuuya didn’t feel the need to.

“I watched you go on all these dates and flirt with every damn woman that breathed the same air as you while I held my tongue. I let you bring me to pumpkin patches and make me do all these silly fucking things that made me fall even more in love with you because it was worth it to see you smile at me like I actually meant something.”

They both were trembling at this point, Dazai unbelieving of what he was hearing while desperately placing soft kisses on the cheek that was so close to him but felt so, so far away.

“As painful as it was for me, it was worth it to let you stupidly compare my hair to every pumpkin you saw if it meant that you were happy, even just for a little bit. I just wanted you to be *happy* .” Chuuya shuttered again in his arms, and his voice was no different as he said,

“Your dumbass friends told me that you felt the same and that I should just go for it, and I idiotically thought I could try by accepting what that employee said about us being a couple. I didn’t want to come on too strong or scare you so it seemed like the best option. For a bit, I was so relieved that you seemed fine with the idea.”

Dazai felt the wetness of tears on his shirt, but said nothing to let Chuuya get it all out, aching at the break in Chuuya's voice as he continued,

"But then you started playing with my feelings like I wasn't anything more than a goddamn toy to you, like it had all been some stupid joke, which had been my fear from the very start. I didn't know what to do, so I just let you", He laughed humorlessly again, "I was pathetic enough that I even found myself looking forward to those moments where you pretended we were a real couple."

"Chuuya-

"I love you, Osamu, I really do, and nothing will ever change that. But I can't act like what you are doing isn't breaking what little I have left in me."

Chuuya was no longer crying, just quietly hiding his face into Dazai's shoulder, who had been gently rocking them back and forth despite the tremble in both of their bodies.

Dazai wasn't naive enough to think that if he didn't derail Chuuya's train of thought that his love was unrequited that they wouldn't forever be stuck in a limbo of knowing that they could've been more, but that Dazai had been too self centered to take a risk for once in his life.

Chuuya had taken a risk by allowing himself to be vulnerable enough to beg to give him a chance at showing Dazai that life was worth living. Chuuya had taken a risk when he helped with Dazai's anxieties before his dates, putting Dazai's happiness before his own. Chuuya had taken a risk when he texted Dazai in the middle of the night asking for help, allowing himself to be vulnerable, and even confessing to him. Even though Dazai at the time didn't realize he had.

And now here was Chuuya, taking yet another risk by telling Dazai

all of this and openly confessing for a second time, and basically placing his heart on a platter for Dazai to do with as he pleased. Chuuya was a prideful man, and to see him swallow that pride for Dazai's sake, filled him with a determination he had never known.

Tell him. Without the lies this time.

It was about time that Dazai started being brave too. After years of Chuuya putting his heart out to the slaughter, it was about time that Dazai did the same.

He just wanted to be honest, for once.

“Chuuya, I don't want it to be pretend either. *Please* .”

He felt Chuuya stiffen as his breath hitched.

“As a certain chibi would say, I've been a complete and utter fucking idiot. I was so focused on not losing the one person who I loved the most in this world that I forgot to tell him that he was just that.”

Chuuya tried to keep his face hidden, but turned his head slightly more toward Dazai's. Dazai smiled lovingly as he brushed Chuuya's bangs out of his face to better look at him. He needed Chuuya to know he was serious. He saw skeptical blue eyes, but he couldn't stop himself now out of fear that he would break this spell and never be able to say what he came here to say.

“I was a complete bastard who thought you had accepted being a couple to get a rise out of me, not realizing that the real reason I had felt strange about it was because I had no idea how badly I had wanted it to be true.” Chuuya was shaking in his arms with eyes blown wide.

“I was being shitty Dazai by giving you sweet names and being loving while being too dishonest with not only you, but with myself, to realize that I had stopped pretending a long time ago. Because once I had you to myself I just couldn’t let you go.”

Dazai sighed, feeling his own tears start to escape again and he started blubbering, but he couldn’t find it in himself to care. His grip tightened and he tilted his face slightly to hide in Chuuya’s neck.

“But I was stupid and scared and I hurt you because of it, and I would spend everyday of the rest of eternity if needed in order to make it up to you. Because in this life the only person who made me want to be me was you. They say that love makes one do crazy things, and it’s almost pathetic that loving you makes me want to do something that should be so simple as to be a human being.”

He slowly brought his face out of its hiding place, not wanting to seem like he didn’t want Chuuya to see him like this. Chuuya lifted his head up as well, and the shocked but hopeful face he saw in reward gave Dazai the courage to gently place his forehead against the other’s as he whispered into the minimal space between them.

“While I am a bandage-wasting bastard, an annoying Mackerel, and the slew of other names my love has graced me with, I am also Dazai Osamu. The same Dazai who used to be someone I had never wanted to be. Someone I had tried to get rid of permanently, but now who I know was made into who they were meant to be because of the love they were so tenderly given. I know Dazai Osamu is who I want to be now. Because the Dazai Osamu I am now is the one who is utterly and hopelessly in love with Nakahara Chuuya, who not only convinced me that this world is worth living in, but who I know I want to spend the rest of that life with.”

“I love you Chuuya, in every meaning of the word. And I’m so *sorry* that it took me almost losing you to realize it.”

He closed his eyes as he felt Chuuya's hands slide up his neck to his cheeks. He allowed his own hands to cover Chuuya's and rub tiny circles there to comfort himself. He could feel the fast breaths from Chuuya's lips from this up close.

"Because Chuuya, I'm not me without you."

Dazai nervously closed his eyes tighter, terrified that he was too late, that his words weren't enough, that he was still going to lose Chuuya. He thought he could handle loving from afar, but it wasn't until this moment that he fully understood how badly he didn't want to have to. He wanted Chuuya to the point that he wasn't sure how he would be able to move on if he hadn't been enough.

But none of that mattered, because he felt lips press gently against his eyelids, one by one, coaxing him into opening them.

When he finally opened his eyes, it was to the most blinding smile he had ever seen on the other's face. From this up close, he could see fresh tear marks on the others face for a completely different reason than before, as he could see an emotion swimming in those endless blues. An emotion that he had been so scared he would never see happen because of him again.

Happiness.

"You have no fucking idea how long I've waited to hear you say that."

Chuuya let out a relieved and happy chuckle, which Dazai couldn't

help but reciprocate in his own euphoria at finally having it out in the open. Chuuya's eyes crinkled from his smile and Dazai felt his heart swell at the sight. There was a sense of normalcy amongst the chaos of this moment.

It felt as though this was how things were always meant to pan out. Dazai felt almost stupid for being so scared, but god, he was so relieved. He couldn't believe this was happening despite how oddly *not* strange it felt. Chuuya looked so handsome with the moonlight shining behind him, and Dazai couldn't believe the other loved him. But, it all felt right.

It was completely normal for them to be laughing and crying in each other's embrace after admitting that they were in love. It was normal that the two most emotionally constipated people in the city had let each other see them at their most vulnerable.

It was normal that the two of them both were aware that in reality, things really weren't all that different.

It wasn't scary to be in love with the person who taught him what love truly was like anymore.

Which is why it didn't feel like a big deal when Dazai's eyes fell to Chuuya's lips, only to look back up and see that Chuuya had been doing the same.

"Can I-"

"Don't ask stupid questions you already know the answer to, dumbass."

There was no heat to those words, and Dazai let out a soft chuckle in response. This was normal.

Which is why it didn't feel like a big deal either when Dazai took that moment to close the barely there distance between them and place his lips gently over Chuuya's.

Dazai could still taste the remnants of Chuuya's tears alongside the surprising softness of his mouth, and it took everything within him to not hastily clutch at Chuuya's hips and pull their bodies closer. The

redhead's curls tickled his face as Dazai pulled back to press their foreheads together, and he felt his heart thump painfully in his chest when he took in the beautiful cast of Chuuya's lashes on high cheekbones.

Dazai felt himself blush embarrassingly at how flustered he felt just over a kiss, but the kiss was with Chuuya. It meant more than any kiss he had ever had before then.

He didn't feel too embarrassed for too long, since from this close, he could not only see how flustered Chuuya was as well, but could feel the heat radiating off of the other's face. He chuckled a little to himself, which Chuuya replied to with a grumble. Chuuya looked down in his embarrassment despite their foreheads staying pressed together and Dazai felt his heart swell again at just how *endearing* it was. He used the grip he had on Chuuya's hands to interlace their fingers, placing them between their chests.

"Chuuya can be cute."

The smack on his arm was expected. The near immediate kiss on the cheek intended to smooth the blow was a pleasant surprise, however.

"You say that like you aren't cute all the time." Dazai felt himself blush.

"Ah, but chibi is cuter."

Chuuya growled.

"I am not! Stop saying such sappy things, Mackerel."

"You said it too! Besides, I can't help it when you look like this." Dazai effortlessly responded, gazing at Chuuya in what he hoped was a look of pure adoration.

Chuuya looked at him quizzically as he laughed, "Look like what? An emotional wreck? I sure feel like one. You don't look much better, just by the way."

"You look so stunning right now that it's taking everything in me not

to just ask you to marry me right here, right now.”

Chuuya sputtered and hid his face in Dazai’s chest as he broke the hold on one of their entwined hands to throw a weak punch at the other. Dazai caught his fist easily and laughed out loud.

“You can’t just say things like that!” Chuuya said, shaking his head against the other’s chest.

“Why not?”

“Because it’s embarrassing! Have you no shame?!”

“Chuuya, I just confessed my undying love to you. And we both were blubbering like idiots the whole time.” Dazai deadpanned.

“Jesus Christ. I really know how to pick ‘em, don’t I? ” Chuuya mumbled, agonized.

“Ah~ so shy even after such a passionate kiss...” Dazai let out a choked noise as Chuuya’s hand came up to cut off his airway.

“If you keep this up, there will never be another time we do this ‘cause I’ll be in jail and you’ll be *dead*.” Dazai nodded his affirmative and tapped at Chuuya’s hand to coax the other into letting him go.

Once Dazai’s airway was cleared, Chuuya slowly kissed the part of his neck that he had put pressure on.

Dazai tried not to get distracted by the action.

“Are you saying that if I keep it up I won’t get another passionate kiss or that you’ll never choke me again? ‘Cause I mean, I’m not opposed to-”

His airway was blocked by two gloved hands this time as the other screamed,

”Shut the fuck up!”

Dazai couldn’t help but chuckle as Chuuya let go again, only to repeat his actions of kissing the spot he wounded.

He watched as Chuuya lifted his head from the spot his lips had been on, eyebrows drawn together as he looked at Dazai's neck like it was something that had asked him a particularly difficult question. Dazai felt himself melt, realizing that this was it.

Sure, there were going to be days where they would be at odds and say things they didn't mean. Sure, there were going to be days where Chuuya would need to be reminded that he deserved to be taken care of, and days where Dazai would lose himself to that dark place again.

But none of that scared him anymore.

There was a time when the light at the end of the tunnel for Dazai had seemed too far away. Unattainable. A time when he didn't even find it worth it to fight those dark thoughts because there was no point in fighting the inevitable. Why fight against it when no matter how fast you ran, or how hard you fought, that light just got further and further away?

But then came Chuuya. A fiery red in his dreary, gray world. The only person in his life who took one look at Dazai drowning in that darkness and decided he was going to fight for him, despite everything working against them. The little chibi who instead of telling him that "a lot of people have it way worse than you do" or "how can you be sad when you have such a great life?" had decided to sit with him in that dark place, creating their own special light that they could share. With Chuuya at his side, Dazai felt like it was okay for him to be alive.

Dazai didn't feel alone anymore.

"...Osamu? Hey. Osamu!"

Dazai jolted a bit, thrown out of his thoughts. He blinked back the cloudiness in his eyes to see Chuuya wiping at his face with a concerned look.

“Hey. I lost you there for a second. What’s wrong?” Chuuya wiped under his eyes again, and Dazai felt moisture move across his face.

He had been crying.

Dazai clutched at Chuuya’s chest desperately.

“You saved me.”

Chuuya’s eyes widened. Dazai smiled shakily as his tears blurred his vision again. He had never been very good at speaking his mind. He kept things to himself because he knew that if he said what he really felt, others would use it against him. He had never been the best at being vulnerable.

But Chuuya helped him be a better version of himself.

“I’m just so fucking *happy* . I love you.”

Chuuya immediately grabbed his head as Dazai buried his face in Chuuya’s chest again. That warmth that had always followed Chuuya no matter where he went had been love. It was in this apartment, on his motorcycle, and on his clothes.

It was in his voice, his actions, and, most of all, his eyes.

And now it was Dazai’s, and he let that warmth surround him as Chuuya started whispering into his hair, running his hands through it gently.

“I love you too. Endlessly. You’ll always have me, I promise.”

Chuuya knew what he was thinking well enough that Dazai didn’t need to struggle through his words. He was understood. Finally.

“You’ve convinced me, Chuuya.”

Chuuya held him just a little tighter at that, placing a painfully gentle kiss to the top of his head.

And in that little bubble they had created on Chuuya’s apartment floor, that special light they had always shared burned just a bit brighter.

Dazai shifted in his sleep, one eye cautiously opening to discern where singing was coming from. He didn’t remember leaving his laptop on when he went to bed, nor did he remember falling asleep in his work clothes.

In his sleepy haze he couldn’t piece together what was happening or who was singing until he looked to the redhead on his right and his brain caught up with him over what had happened just a few hours ago. He was in Chuuya’s bed, both of them having crashed from the exhaustion of crying their eyes out in each other’s arms like a couple of fools.

A couple.

It was odd how bashful he felt remembering him and Chuuya confessing their love to each other, but at the same time he felt a rush of affection for the chibi next to him, realizing that the other was his now, and he, the other’s.

He blearily opened both of his eyes to a sight he found he could get used to.

Chuuya was leaning against the headboard of his bed, an old, black acoustic guitar in his hands, quietly singing a song to himself as he looked down at the strings he was playing, clearly unaware that he

had woken Dazai. Dazai decided to keep it that way for just a little longer.

Chuuya had always had a beautiful singing voice, but he never really showcased it. Dazai always teased him about it when in reality he just wanted to find ways to get Chuuya to sing for him. Like his poetry, hearing Chuuya sing was a display of trust that Dazai cherished, and was something Dazai would be content to listen to forever.

Dazai sighed in his contentment, not realizing how loud it was in comparison to the quiet of the room, but was surprised to see Chuuya just smirk. Ah, so he had known Dazai was awake.

Dazai huffed a bit, but his expression quickly melted into something much softer when Chuuya slowly moved his eyes from the guitar strings to look down at Dazai next to him. Half-lidded, Chuuya's eyes traced Dazai's face as Dazai felt himself start to sit up.

Chuuya continued to play as Dazai continued to move closer, both of their eyes never straying from the other's. Chuuya's voice got slower, clearly distracted but never shaking in his effort to complete the song.

Dazai's eyelids fell as well, eyes watching the other's lips.

Chuuya stuttered a bit in his progression, fingers still strumming but attention solely on the face now so close to his.

Dazai moved ever closer, one hand on the guitar and lips ghosting over Chuuya's enough that their breathing felt like a shared task. Chuuya stopped his strumming as he quietly finished the lyrics against Dazai's mouth.

One would think that considering how long it had taken them to get to this point, that everything would feel rushed. Like they had to make up for the lost time, making everything fast and dramatic to compensate.

But it was with slow movements that their lips came together. It was languid the way Dazai continuously parted his lips to accept

Chuuya's. It didn't feel like they needed to rush. Dazai wanted to go slow, for he had waited his whole life for this. He was going to take his time.

He felt Chuuya sigh heavily against his lips and Dazai felt something clench in his chest.

It was a painful reminder that Chuuya had been waiting the longest.

As one of Chuuya's hands fell to Dazai's waist, Dazai tried to get closer...

...only for his hand to slip on the guitar.

Dazai gasped and broke apart from Chuuya in his shock, knocking against the guitar yet again. Not only did he cause the guitar to let out a shrill, ear splitting sound, but the instrument fell out of Chuuya's grip in his own shock from the noise, falling to the ground in an even louder *thump*.

The residual sound of the strings echoed in the silence of the room, both men frozen.

Halfway onto Chuuya's lap and in the middle of futilely trying to reach the guitar before it fell, Dazai stared at the ground with wide eyes before breathlessly asking,

"Did I break it?"

Immediately Chuuya let out a 'pfft' noise, causing Dazai to whip his head back toward the other, who's cheeks were puffed out in a clear effort not to laugh. Dazai blushed as his eyes narrowed, trying to emulate the fear tactics he used to use as a teenager,

“It was an accident, alright? I *don’t* want to hear it.”

Chuuya let out a little “*hehe*” but slapped a hand over his mouth to stop any more from coming out, shaking from the effort. Dazai sat up and glared at the other, aware of how hot his face felt. He started softly punching at the other’s stomach petulantly.

“*Chuuuuuuya!!* Stop it! Chibi is so mean!”

Through his hand Chuuya barely kept it together enough to say,

“Ah~ so shy even after such a passionate kiss...”

Dazai gasped dramatically and smacked Chuuya’s arm at the audacity of having his words used against him.

“*Chuuya!*”

At the scolding tone in the other’s voice, Chuuya busted out laughing to the point that he had to hold his stomach from the pain. Dazai crossed his arms and growled at the other’s amusement, turning his face the other way, but in the back of his mind, a voice reminded him how happy it made him to see Chuuya laughing.

Chuuya rarely lost it when it came to laughter, so seeing him literally struggling to breathe broke apart Dazai’s resolve to be angry piece by piece. Dazai tried his hardest not to break a smile, but when Chuuya literally started wheezing he couldn’t stop the chuckles that started to break from his own mouth.

In a matter of seconds both of them were hysterically laughing, only wheezing harder each time they made eye contact to the point that there was no actual sound coming out of their mouths. Chuuya was doubled over on his side, half hanging off the bed while Dazai was

draped over him, attempting to muffle his laughter on the other's clothes.

And as Chuuya's arms reached up to hug him closer, laughs slowly dying down, Dazai couldn't help but think that, maybe, just maybe...

...He was ready to know what happiness truly felt like.

Notes for the Chapter:

And there you have it!!!! :)

**The song Chuuya was singing was "Like Real People Do" by Hozier!

I really hope you enjoyed this chapter since it was such a big chapter, but also this has meant so much to me to write so, as always, any feedback is appreciated and I really want to know how everyone felt reading this chapter so let me know in the comments!!!

Thank you so much :)

!!!POSSIBLE STORM BRINGER SPOILER FOR WHAT IM ABOUT TO SAY, SO IGNORE IF YOU HAVENT SEEN ANYTHING AND DO NOT SPOIL ANYTHING FOR ANYONE IN THE COMMENTS!!!!!!!!!!

I actually wrote this way before storm bringer came out but you know, "Like Real People Do" hits even harder for soukoku recently...ha ha...I'm in pain

8. Things were different, but somehow still the same

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi. Wow. We have reached the end.

This writing has really meant a lot to me since this was my first time putting my writing out for others to see, so having people leave kudos and comments has truly meant the world to me. I just wanted to thank you all before we get into this final chapter, so, thank you again for all the love and support!

I also want to give a shoutout to konfoz (check her out pls she is amazing!!!!) for not only being my beta and reading this entire thing multiple times for me out of the goodness of her heart, but also for always supporting me :)

As always, thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy :)

“Chuuya and I are about to hit our three year mark.”

Oda looked up from his drink, Ango still sipping at his tomato juice. The wind outside howled, leaves blowing in the air, painting a backdrop portrait of the approaching autumn storm in the window behind Oda.

The moonlight broke through the clouds briefly to illuminate the only other occupant of the bar with them, his brown eyes shining.

Oda took a moment to really look at Dazai, hearing the way he was trying to keep a neutral tone while saying that.

Dazai had changed in the past few years. His coat looked nicer with the fabric fitting him a little better, he wore his hair differently with one side behind his ear, his tone was a little softer, his smiles a little more constant.

But the biggest change was the new shine in his eyes. A far away glimpse from what they used to be. Oda smiled.

“Ah, congratulations. Have anything fun planned?”

Dazai continued to try and act neutral, just sipping at his drink nonchalantly.

“Oh you know, just dinner probably. What with chibi finishing up the editing for the book, I don’t think we will have much time for anything else.”

Dazai had a small quirk to his lips, like he was trying not to laugh. Oda raised an eyebrow.

“You don’t say.”

“Don’t encourage him, he’s gonna go off the rails again. Why do you sound so suspicious?” Ango asked, sighing at the youngest.

Dazai just smiled innocently, batting his eyelashes.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, dearest Ango!”

“That just makes you sound even more suspicious, you know.”

Dazai sighed dramatically putting a hand to his chest.

“You wound me!”

Oda chuckled. His curiosity got the better of him, however.

“But really though, why are you being so secretive?”

Dazai turned to him, reminiscent of a few years prior after a certain man had proclaimed war against his best friend for accepting a comment about them being a couple. Ango shuttered a bit at the memory.

But this time, the smile was blindingly bright as his eyes fell to something behind Oda.

“Chuuya isn’t as subtle as he may think he is, that’s all.”

The bar door swung open.

“What are you going on about now, Mackerel? Ango looks like he’s about to piss himself.” A new voice was added, Oda turning to the redhead who just entered in the midst of taking off his hat. The red and orange leaves clung to parts of his body, pulling more focus to the orange of his hair as the wind behind him tousled it. He wore a white button down under a half buttoned up long coat, boots clicking in his saunter to the bar.

The door shut behind him.

“I assure you my bladder is just fine!” Ango huffed sarcastically.

“Shut it, Professor Glasses.”

Chuuya nodded politely at Oda, who reciprocated the action as Chuuya placed his hat on the spot next to him and walked up to his partner. Dazai’s smile softened as Chuuya tilted his chin with a gloved hand to place a habitual quick kiss to his lips in greeting, before walking back to his spot and taking a seat.

“We were talking about you, actually.” Oda commented.

Chuuya quirked an eyebrow at Dazai, who quickly turned back to his drink to take a sip.

“Were you now? Should I call my lawyer?” Chuuya joked.

Oda chuckled. Dazai scoffed into his glass.

“Don’t worry hatrack, I would never say anything bad about you.” He turned to him teasingly.

“What’s the point when you aren’t around to hear my shit talking?”

Chuuya had a deadpan look on his face as he said, “Knock it off.”

Surprisingly, Dazai did. He just laughed a little to himself before letting it go. Oda regarded him.

Was that maturity he saw? He never thought he would see the day.

Chuuya brushed some of the leaves off of himself as the bartender came up to get his order. He shook his head politely as he commented, "I'm actually just here to pick his ass up, so no thank you." The bartender smiled as always, nodding to Chuuya before pretending to go back to work.

"Busy with the book, eh?" Ango asked.

Chuuya's face morphed to something more proud, his chest puffing out a bit.

"Yeah. I just have to finish some editing and send it out, so...time is of the essence, I suppose."

"That's great, Chuuya." Oda commented genuinely, smiling at him. Chuuya looked sheepish, rubbing his hands together slightly in his lap.

"Oh! Thank you."

"Awww Odasaku! You got him all embarrassed! You know Chuuya doesn't handle kind words very well!" Dazai cooed, standing up to stand next to Chuuya's chair and pinch his cheeks.

Chuuya growled at him, but tellingly didn't push him away.

"You have no room to talk!"

The two bickered for a moment back and forth, Oda and Ango watching from the sidelines.

Chuuya's voice boomed throughout the empty bar, volume high but tone painfully fond, his eyes holding nothing but warmth as Dazai continued to poke him and put his arms around the other, his own eyes closing in obvious glee as he placed a kiss to Chuuya's hair mid-argument. Their entire demeanour spoke of years of familiarity, the whole picture coming together with the knowledge that they were actually together now.

"You two are very cute together." Oda commented in his usual blunt tone, Ango chuckling a bit behind them in agreement.

“WE ARE NOT!” They both simultaneously shouted petulantly before Dazai started practically dragging Chuuya out of his chair to make their way to the door. Dazai had his grip tight around the other’s neck as Chuuya just blankly stared at the other two people getting farther and farther away from him.

“I can’t deal with such disgusting accusations. We are out of here.”

“LET GO OF ME!”

“No can do~”

Their voices faded out as the door shut behind them, Oda and Ango just sharing a look of fond exasperation at the display they just witnessed.

Things were a lot different than they were three years ago, but somehow still the same.

“Hey, Chuuya.”

Chuuya looked up from his take out food to the man sitting across from him at their dining room table. Dazai had moved in with him officially six months into their relationship, but he still stupidly felt his heart race whenever they just ate dinner together in their home. They ate at the table they had bought together, eating the take out that they were regulars at, all in their shared home.

It made everything feel so... *real*.

“Hmm?”

Dazai should’ve hesitated. He should’ve thought through what he was about to bring up, knowing that he was opening up a can of worms to a very serious conversation. But for once, Dazai didn’t bother thinking of every possible scenario to his actions because for once...

...There was only one.

“I know what I want for our anniversary.”

Chuuya put down his chopsticks, placing them to the side to better look at Dazai. Today was their three year anniversary, but Dazai had said he wanted to stay home despite Chuuya making dinner reservations weeks ago. Chuuya had agreed, not really caring what they did as long as it was together, but he couldn't help but be curious as to why the other had canceled.

"And what would that be, Osamu?"

Dazai stood up, walking over to Chuuya's chair, the other looking up at him curiously. He tapped at Chuuya's head and tilted his chin up, prompting the other to get out of his chair as well. Dazai put his head on his shoulder, embracing him, smiling when he felt Chuuya put his arms around him as well.

"Let's go to the pumpkin patch tomorrow."

Chuuya hummed, running his hands through brown hair.

"Okay? We do that every year. Why are you asking that as if it's something special? No offense."

Dazai laughed breathlessly onto the other's neck.

"Because I don't need to look for any new pumpkins. I just want to go."

Chuuya didn't say anything, and despite Dazai not being able to see him, he knew he looked befuddled.

Dazai lifted his head from Chuuya's shoulder, raising a hand to trace Chuuya's hair behind his ear. Chuuya watched him, open fondness in his eyes. Dazai smiled.

"I have no need to look for new ones, when my pumpkin I want forever is right in front of me."

Chuuya laughed embarrassed, cheeks tinting pink.

"God, you'll never let me live that pet name down, will you?"

Dazai gazed down at the other, face turning more serious, but

keeping the tender tint to his eyes. Chuuya quieted down, as if sensing the shift in the atmosphere.

Dazai unwrapped one of his hands from around Chuuya to pat at the other's pants pocket, a light *'thump'* noise coming from the action.

Chuuya froze.

Dazai's voice turned shaky.

"Chuuya has been looking at rings, has he not?"

They had talked about it before, the idea of marriage. For a while they decided that it just wasn't something they needed to do, since they knew they wanted to be together regardless of legality, and considering they would have to go elsewhere for it to be recognized. Dazai knew he was in this for life, and Chuuya had expressed the same sentiment. It was enough to know that they wanted this to be a permanent thing verbally.

But...

"I, I mean, u-uh," Chuuya quickly pulled what was in his pocket out of it, placing it behind his back.

Dazai kissed his lips softly, stopping the nervous rambling before dropping his hand from the other's pocket to drift to his own.

Sure, they had decided it wasn't necessary since they wanted to be together no matter what...

But...

Chuuya's eyes widened, still staring at Dazai's, who's eyebrows were drawn in his breaking composure. Their eyes never left each other as Dazai reached in his pocket, rummaging around before pulling out...

...A box.

Chuuya looked down, only to gasp softly at the box in Dazai's hand. Dazai placed his forehead on the other's, coaxing him to reveal the box hidden behind his own back. They both looked down between

them at the identical boxes looking back at them. Dazai felt his chest warm as Chuuya began to ramble.

“I know we talked about it, I know it’s not really, you know, necessary, I just wanted something...tangible...I guess. I-I’ve had it for a while now, I was just-well, I wanted to wait for the right moment and I-”

“Chuuya.”

Said man looked back up into Dazai’s eyes, open tenderness painting his entire face despite how flustered he was. Dazai didn’t feel much better, his own face burning and a fellow suspicious burn making itself known behind his eyes.

“Chuuya, I-”

He dropped a hand to the box, Chuuya doing the same, before they both opened them with shaky hands at the same time, the same ring in different sizes glittering in the moonlight.

“For our anniversary, I want to start calling you my husband.”

Chuuya sighed, relief and joy shining through the small smile he wore. Dazai reached to pick up the ring Chuuya bought, falling just shy of it when Chuuya took it out of the box himself, dropped the box to the ground unceremoniously and reached for Dazai’s left hand.

Dazai watched as Chuuya put the ring on his finger, his hand shaking.

“I can’t believe we not only both bought a ring but bought the exact same fucking one. I thought I was being so damn romantic but here you are, stealing my thunder like always.” Chuuya joked, voice watery as he finished putting the matte black ring on Dazai’s finger. He lifted it gently to his mouth to place a kiss there, Dazai feeling horribly cliché but too happy to comment on it.

“If it makes you feel better, the truth is I hacked into your email to see what jeweler you were contacting and just got the same one. Chuuya is not subtle, it’s one of his charms.”

Dazai took the matching ring from his own box to do the same with Chuuya's ring finger. He let his hand linger on the ring once he had put it on the other's hand, admiring the wave of possessiveness he felt. He made a mental note to ask Chuuya to stop wearing his gloves outside so often so that everyone can see. Chuuya laughed breathlessly while he watched.

"Goddamn it, I should've known that was you. I changed my password like five times to get back into it. I thought it was a system error."

Dazai intertwined their fingers, his head dropping to Chuuya's.

"It's not my fault your password was predictable. 'Winelover123'? Really Chuuya?"

"Hey! It's not my fault that I didn't think that my husband was shameless enough to hack into my email account."

Dazai's heart skipped at the title.

"Husband, huh?"

Chuuya leaned in to place a painfully soft kiss to Dazai's lips briefly before breaking it by just a hair to whisper against him,

"Yes, my shameless husband who I regretfully love very much."

Dazai smiled, his eyes feeling glossy.

"Ah, I guess I love my chibi husband too."

"You guess?!"

"Hmm, let me think about it."

He tilted his head up for a moment in pretend thought, before turning to the deadpan look of his partner. He placed a kiss between irritated eyebrows before placing his smile over the other's lips.

"How disgusting. Just as I thought, I love him very very much."

“Hmm.”

Dazai was lost in thought, hand on his chin and eyes locked on the plant in front of him. The orange was nice, sure, but was it good enough? It looked a bit light on the bottom, that wouldn't do, would it? Was it deep enough in it's orange?

A couple was a few feet away from him taking a cheesy photo, arguing over how many they had to take to get the right angle while some kid was kicking at the dirt a ways away, their parents coaxing a screaming baby. Dazai paid the commotion no mind, brain whirling from the pumpkin lying at his feet.

He didn't break his stare from the pumpkin.

“Chuuya?”

No response.

He huffed, turning away from the plant to glance around him. He felt his eyebrow raise in confusion when his hatrack husband was nowhere to be seen.

“Chuuya?” He called again, with no response. He sighed dramatically, going as far as to bend his back far enough it cracked before yelling a little louder in a heartbroken voice,

“Oh Chuuya! Honey darling? Love of my life? Petit hatrack? My one and only-”

“Oh my fucking -WHAT?!”

Dazai beamed as he saw Chuuya pop up from where he had been crouched behind a bush to watch what looked to be a lizard, the couple taking photos suddenly making themselves scarce at the murderous aura coming from the smaller man.

Dazai's eyes sparkled.

“Come quick! This might be the one!”

Chuuya rolled his eyes, making his way to the pumpkin to stand at Dazai's side with his hands in his pockets. Dazai carefully lifted it up to place gently at the other's head to compare the color. Chuuya huffed but didn't say anything as he let the other study him.

Dazai took in the stoic frown on the other's face, eyes betraying his irritated stance with how warm they were looking back at him. Dazai glanced at the metal on his hand that was holding up the pumpkin, his smile bright.

"Ah, my pumpkin's orange is just too pretty. It's not a match."

Chuuya looked at him curiously as he placed the pumpkin back on the ground.

"What do you mean? It looked pretty enough. It's a nice pumpkin, and it's just for decoration anyway."

Dazai smirked at the other.

"I wasn't talking about the plant."

Chuuya sputtered a bit at that, raising a leg to kick at Dazai's shins, who was laughing at Chuuya's reaction.

"Shut up!"

Dazai ignored him, eyes catching on a cute tiny pumpkin that had some green lines running up and down its sides. It was alone in its patch, all the other ones seeming to have been bought. Dazai felt weird looking at it. He pointed it out to Chuuya.

"What about that one?"

Chuuya glanced at it as well, taking note of its unique pattern and the lack of pumpkins around it. He sighed fondly.

"A little one left on its own." He went over and picked it up, smiling as he handed it to Dazai.

Dazai looked at it as well. It was perfectly fine, just an odd pattern and bumps here and there, but a fine pumpkin all the same.

“I like it.”

Chuuya chuckled, voice warm as Dazai looked at him with the pumpkin tucked into his arms.

“Me too.”

When Chuuya fell into step with him to head toward the check out line, Dazai dropped a kiss on the other’s cheek.

“You’ve always had a soft spot for the lonely types, huh?” He teased.

Chuuya rolled his eyes, commenting, “You say that as if you aren’t the same.”

Dazai hummed, not really having anything to say to that.

Being lonely felt like a distant memory. Sure, the two of them had days where they were too busy and couldn’t see each other much and that loneliness crept back up, but they made sure to make up for that. Dazai still had days where he wanted to be alone as did Chuuya. They both had their moments of shutting the other out despite their progress. But they were trying, and Dazai in his heart knew that the loneliness he had once felt was a feeling of the past.

And as he took out his wallet to pay for the pumpkins, knowing that the cash inside was Chuuya’s money, he realized just how different things were.

The pumpkin they were buying was going to go to their apartment, on the table Dazai had bought a year ago. They were going to celebrate Halloween in their apartment just like they had the past two years, where Dazai would be too lazy to go to the door when kids would knock to yell ‘Trick or Treat!’ so Chuuya would do it and give the kids way more candy than what was necessary. They were going to decorate with tacky bats everywhere and Dazai would stick one to Chuuya’s back, only to see how long it would take the other to notice.

Dazai will take Chuuya to his office Halloween party like always, where Chuuya will drink one too many glasses of wine and trash talk him with Kunikida while Dazai watches from the side.

But this year, Atsushi will gasp when he comes up to keep Dazai company and ask him why they are wearing matching rings.

“Here you go!”

Dazai was thrown out of his thoughts and took the change offered to him. The employee smiled brightly.

“I hope you have a wonderful day. If you don’t mind me saying so, you are truly a lovely couple!”

Chuuya’s eyes widened, while Dazai’s softened. Chuuya looked up at him, his eyes holding so much more emotion than what was warranted from a casual comment from a well-meaning employee.

But Dazai understood why. He smiled in what he hoped was the happiest way he possibly could at Chuuya, his hand falling to the other’s, intertwining their fingers for the employee to see.

“Thank you. We get that a lot.”

Notes for the Chapter:

So, there you have it!

I actually have two other more one shot kind of writings for this specific AU so I will be posting those, but it's so crazy to see this work finish. I can't put into words how grateful I am for all the support you all have given me for this work, so truly, thank you!!!

As always, any feedback is always appreciated :)

Until next time! :)